







Thomas Gilchrist.

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THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE





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ROBESPIERRE

# THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

THE YOUNG ROBESPIERRE—AIGOIN—THE  
SUPREME BEING—CATHERINE THÉOT—  
HERMAN—TRUCHON—MARCANDIER—  
FOUQUIER-TINVILLE—THE 9<sup>TH</sup> THERMIDOR  
—BARÈRE AND VADIER—BABEUF

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LONDON

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE LTD.

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.2

1927

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*Made and Printed in Great Britain  
by Hazell, Watson & Viney Ltd.  
London and  
Aylesbury*



## PREFACE

THE present book is a continuation of those which we have published during the past dozen years in order to throw light upon the obscure problems of the revolutionary drama.

Like *Robespierre terroriste*, like *La Corruption parlementaire sous la Terreur*, it is a collection of critical studies based upon documents. Its method is the same, and the spirit inspiring it is identical.

To make no assertions without valid proofs, to hold nothing accurate save what is vouched for by well-informed and trustworthy witnesses, to judge the men and things of the past only in accordance with the general modes of thought and standards of judgment of their age, pitilessly to reject tendentious or erroneous interpretations even if set in circulation by the best accredited historians; in short, to serve nothing but the truth, and to tell it in its entirety: such has been our unvaried rule, which we are not prepared to set aside in order to sacrifice to the fashions of the day.

Because we have occasionally happened to draw attention to the preconceived ideas, exaggerations, weaknesses and prejudices, the interested motives and mental reservations of those who have taken up the pen before us—some of whom are still living—there have been dark whispers that we were “swayed by passion,” and people have deprecated what they called our “polemics.”

We freely admit that disingenuousness does not leave us unmoved and that the unfathomable ignorance of some persons provokes us to irony; and we do not believe that the best historian is the man whom nothing will rouse. He is a poor servant of truth who is incapable of wrath when she is outraged; he is a poor lover of justice who is never ready to fight for her.

The historian has a duty both to himself and to his readers. He has to a certain extent the cure of souls. He is accountable for the reputation of the mighty dead whom he conjures up and portrays. If he makes a mistake, if he repeats slanders on those who were blameless, or, on the other hand, holds up profligates and schemers to admiration, he not only commits a bad action; he poisons and misleads the mind of the public.

Historical characters are the common inheritance of the nation. It is not a matter of indifference whether the picture one gives of them be accurate or distorted; for the ideas which they represent, the causes which they have served, have not died with them.

It is because we believe in the social virtue of history, it is because we are convinced that it is a school for the statesman and the citizen, that we cannot approach the study of it without being deeply sensible of our responsibility.

Humanity will always grope its way blindly towards the future unless it is able to profit by the experience of the past. History is a mirror. If the mirror warps the image it leads the guide astray.

It is this our high ideal of the function of history which perhaps explains those accusations of passion of which we are proud. Enough for

us that it has been impossible to accuse us of those mean and paltry passions which are the sign of political fanaticism, sectarian, personal or party spirit, and the desire for honours or office. At heart, all that vexes our discreet censors is our independence.

We have dared to undertake the defence of Robespierre at a time when democracy, led astray by false knowledge and diverted from its traditional course by so many regrettable deviations, has become on the whole detached from his great memory. Our audacity had obviously a touch of impertinence. We should perhaps have been forgiven if we had been found at fault. Our fault lies in this, that we were right.

The dozen essays brought together here are only apparently disjointed. All of them contribute towards improving our knowledge of the man in whom was incarnate all that was best in the party of the Mountain and in Revolutionary France. All of them have it as their object to correct hasty judgments which the documents and facts rise up to disprove.

The first shows us the work of Robespierre's brother on his mission in Franche-Comté. This so-called terrorist opened the doors of the prisons in which were incarcerated both fanatics and federalists. He thus incurred the hatred of the real terrorists, of those who abused, in the interests of their passions and appetites, the powers conferred upon them solely for the safety of their country. One already foresees how and why a Bernard (of Saintes) and his like came to detest Robespierre and work for his overthrow.

The second study is very short, and brings into prominence Régis Deshorties, a friend of the younger Robespierre, a smiling and sensible young native of Arras, who sends him a lively



account of the gossip of the little town, and at the same time expresses to him all the admiration felt by the worthy provincials for his great brother's works.

The third, which brings to light an important unpublished correspondence of Aigoin, the Montpellier banker, with the elder Robespierre, brings home to us in a palpable form the reasons for the immense popularity which he enjoyed among the *élite* of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. This popularity was by no means a blind one, for the banker disputes the policy advocated by Robespierre, and only gives in to his opinion when vanquished by the facts.

The fourth study, devoted to the so-called Cult of the Supreme Being, defines Robespierre's attitude towards the religious problem on the morrow of the fall of the Hébertists. It destroys the malignant legend which has persistently represented him under the guise of a pontificating fanatic. It brings into prominence the purely political reasons for his actions, and reveals his rare qualities as a statesman.

The fifth study throws fresh light on the affair of Catherine Théot, that equivocal intrigue trumped up against Robespierre by the fanatics of irreligion in order to trip him up by means of ridicule.

The sixth elucidates the relations between Robespierre and Fouquier-Tinville. It was far from the case that the sinister public prosecutor was a docile instrument in the hands of the supposed dictator; the two men detested each other. If the Committee of Public Safety had not refused to dismiss Fouquier at Robespierre's request, perhaps the Great Terror would not have had such a mass of victims.

The seventh study reconstitutes the private

life of a fellow-townsmen of Robespierre's, Herman of Artois, President of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The letters, full of savour, which Herman wrote to his brother reveal a candid soul filled with love for the common weal.

The eighth study contains an analysis, based upon unpublished documents of appreciable interest, of the paltry reasons for those fatal divisions which gradually detached from Robespierre the majority of his colleagues on the committees of government.

The ninth study, which is still more novel, discloses the dark intrigue which was to come to a head on the 9th Thermidor at its very inception. It shows us how Robespierre's enemies did not hesitate to employ creatures as despicable as Truchon or Marcandier, in order to undermine by roundabout means a man whose virtue was embarrassing to them.

The tenth study retells and corrects the story of the 9th Thermidor by means of the unpublished records of the Parisian sections. It overthrows the received opinion with regard to Robespierre's alleged hide-bound timidity. It gives the true reasons for the defeat of the Commune.

The eleventh study makes known an unpublished estimate by Buonarroti of the part played by Barère and Vadier on the 9th Thermidor.

Lastly, the twelfth sums up the opinions pronounced by Babeuf upon the Incorruptible. Both of these help us to understand why Robespierre's memory continued to be the object of a regular cult among all democrats during the first few generations succeeding the Revolution.

Thus the central figure of this work is Robespierre; not an imaginary Robespierre, the blood-stained puppet of Thermidorian fabrication, but the real Robespierre, a just and clear-sighted

statesman who lived but for the good of his country.

Cambacérès used to say that the case for Robespierre had never been presented. He appealed from the hasty condemnation of the men of Thermidor to posterity. This book, which is not an apology, provides a solid contribution towards the material for this great trial, which impartial history will one day bring to an end by deciding it in accordance with justice and truth.

DIJON,

*October 3, 1924.*

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# THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

## CHAPTER I

THE YOUNGER ROBESPIERRE IN FRANCHE-COMTÉ  
(PLUVIÔSE, YEAR II)<sup>1</sup>

WHEN those opposed to the Revolution persist in identifying Robespierre with the Terror, and holding this great democrat responsible for all the blood that was then shed, they are true to their character. In order to strike at the democratic idea, they aim at the man who personified it and caused it to triumph during his lifetime. But when professed admirers of the revolutionary *bloc*, when so-called republicans go so far as to join in the chorus, I am bound either to point out their prodigious ignorance and equal lack of penetration, or else to ask myself whether the love of progress which they display so ostentatiously is really sincere. There is one truth which imposes conviction upon any unprejudiced person who ascertains the facts before arriving at a decision, or who takes the trouble to read the documents and disentangle their meaning in the light of circumstances; this truth was formulated long since by Ernest Hamel, and ought to be obvious: "Among all the men of the Revolution it was Robespierre who, without

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in *Les Annales révolutionnaires*, 1914, t. VII, pp. 309-37.

ever making any concessions to the reactionary party, succeeded in the highest degree in combining moderation and wisdom with the energy and inflexibility necessary for the triumph of the republican idea.”<sup>1</sup>

There is perhaps nothing which throws more light on the precise nature of Robespierre's policy than the mission carried out by his brother Augustin in Franche-Comté during the month Pluviôse, of the Year II (end of January and February, 1794). While the elder Robespierre was incessantly in the thick of the struggle both at the Jacobin Club and the Convention, acting as a mediator between the Hébertists and Dantonists, and trying to induce them to sacrifice their individual grudges in the interests of the Republic; while he was at once disowning the violence of the *Père Duchesne*, which was scaring the public, and the mild tone of the *Vieux Cordelier*, which was reviving the courage of the aristocrats and discrediting the revolutionary system; while he was bravely exposing the rogues and schemers of both parties: the “ultra-revolutionaries,” who counted upon wiping out the memory of the blemishes upon their public and private life by an exaggerated demagoguery, and the “citra-revolutionaries,” who reckoned upon finding a safe oblivion for their dishonest dealings in a general amnesty, and did not hesitate to seek their personal salvation in the breakdown of the government; the younger Robespierre was fighting against the same enemies, the same errors and the same interested motives in one of the French provinces. He was endeavouring to occupy a middle position between that “moderantism” and that exaggeration, which both lead, by different ways, to counter-revolution. His

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de Robespierre*, 1867, t. III, p. 403.

chief aim was to make the Republic loved rather than feared, while making men respect it; and he succeeded. By the time he left, he had won the hearts of the grateful people; but the politicians, to whom the Terror was a career, bore him a bitter grudge for checking their exploits, and were preparing to avenge themselves.

The day after the capture of Toulon the younger Robespierre had suddenly returned to Paris, in order to point out to the Committee of Public Safety the profound divergences separating him, Ricord and Salicetti from their two other colleagues on mission, Barras and Fréron.<sup>1</sup> He complained that the two last-named had no idea beyond terrorisation, he described their cruelties at Marseilles, and said a word about their extortions. On the 16th Nivôse, at the Jacobin Club, he accused Hébert of being the cause of those anti-religious movements which he considered impolitic. He therefore rallied to his brother's policy, and, like him, denounced extremists and rogues.

Now the elder Robespierre had just learnt that the doctrines of Barras and Fréron, of Hébert and Chabot, were at that time being put into practice in the department of Haute-Saône by a representative on mission, Bernard of Saintes, who was terrorising the population in order to carry on his private schemes with complete impunity. Robespierre the elder had his information from a citizen of Vesoul, Viennot, the chemist, a man of worth who was afterwards professor of chemistry at the *École Centrale*. Viennot had doubtless been introduced to him by his former schoolfellow Humbert, in whose house in the Rue de Saintonge, in the Marais,

<sup>1</sup> See Edmond Poupé, *Lettres de Barras et de Fréron en mission dans le Midi* (1910), and particularly the letter of the 6th Nivôse.



Robespierre had lodged at the time of the Constituent Assembly. Viennot had made the journey to Paris in order to plead "the cause of oppressed patriotism before Maximilien."<sup>1</sup> He represented to him that the department of Haute-Saône was one of the most patriotic in France, that it had never, he might say, been disturbed by the religious controversies which had been so serious elsewhere, for non-juring priests had always been in a small minority there.<sup>2</sup> He reminded him that this patriotic department alone had raised twelve battalions of volunteers and deserved to be held up for this<sup>3</sup> as an example to the rest of France; that it had been the first to pay its taxes; and that nowhere were the law and the Convention more respected. At the time of the events of May 31, no doubt, the departmental administration had protested against the violence done to the Convention, but this protest was actually a proof of the sincerity of its obedience. Moreover, the members of the administration had acquiesced without delay in the accomplished fact. How then did it happen that the representative Bernard of Saintes, without troubling to hold an enquiry, or visiting the department, had deprived all the properly constituted authorities of office in a body and kept them under observation; that he had brought the magistrates trusted by the people under the operation of the law of suspects, and replaced

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoire du citoyen Viennot à l'administration centrale du département sur les inculpations qui lui sont faites* (Memorial of Citizen Viennot to the central administration of the department on the charges brought against him), Fructidor, Year VII, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Two hundred and eighty-five as opposed to 118 non-jurors.

<sup>3</sup> On September 1, 1792, the Legislative Assembly had declared that the department of Haute-Saône had raised a levy of 6,000 men in four days for the Army of the Rhine; it therefore carried a motion to the effect that this department had rendered distinguished service to the country.

them by others "immoral and greedy of gain," who multiplied arrests on the most trivial pretexts? The prisons of Vesoul were filled to overflowing with hundreds of prisoners. The most patriotic citizens, those who had given pledges to the new order of affairs as early as 1789, the President of the People's Society of Vesoul and his brother, were among those in close confinement. Bernard of Saintes threatened bloodshed. He had written on the 2nd Frimaire to the National Commissary of the district of Lure: "Since the Gauthiers of Pomey are to be sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal, hurry on their departure to Paris; we must not leave villains alive or the guillotine fasting."<sup>1</sup> These unfortunate creatures were afterwards acquitted by the Revolutionary Tribunal. On all sides Bernard's agents, and in particular Joly, formerly *procureur-général syndic*, alluded to by the citizens of Vesoul in their memorial as "his favourite and vizier," were closing and desecrating churches and threatening the peaceable constitutional priests with the worst violence if they continued their services. In connection with these excesses, which nothing could justify, Viennot described to Robespierre the elder the personal conduct of the representative of the people. At Montbéliard, a property of the Duke of Württemberg, of which he had made an easy conquest, he had surrounded himself with shady men of business, such as the Jew Tréfous of Belfort, who made frequent visits to Bâle, Petitcolas, the fraudulent bankrupt from Besançon,

<sup>1</sup> *Les citoyens composant la commune de Vesoul, réunis en société populaire, à Bernard de Saintes, sur son compte-rendu de la partie critiquée de sa mission* (The citizens composing the commune of Vesoul, assembled in the People's Society, to Bernard of Saintes on his report of the part of his mission under criticism), Year III. Documents adduced in support of their case, no. 10.

who had changed his name to Pury, Rochet, the iron-master of Audincourt, etc. He had made a contract with the Jew Tréfous for 10,000 ells of cloth at 36 francs 10 sols an ell, though Genoux-Prachée, a merchant of Vesoul, was offering him the same goods at 16 francs the ell. The transaction struck Hérault de Séchelles as so scandalous that he detained Tréfous for a moment and reproached him with having "bought" his contract.<sup>1</sup> Rochet, the lessee of the Audincourt iron-works, had become an intimate of Bernard's, who exempted him, by special order, from payment of the sum of 16,000 livres, his quota of the levy of 250,000 livres assessed on the country districts in the region of Montbéliard.<sup>2</sup> Bernard went even further. He appointed Rochet president of the new district of Montbéliard, attached to the department of Haute-Saône. He furnished supplies for the iron-works by means of requisitioning<sup>3</sup>; he recommended their iron to the Convention in the following terms: "It is of the best quality, it is

<sup>1</sup> See, in Armand Lods, *Bernard de Saintes et la réunion de Montbéliard à la France* (Proceedings of the *Société d'émulation de Montbéliard*, t. XIX, 1888), the facsimile of the curious letter in which Bernard attempts to justify himself to Hérault de Séchelles, dated the thirteenth of the second month. We see from this letter that Tréfous had also obtained a contract for blankets amounting to 18,000 livres cash.

<sup>2</sup> *Arrêté* (Ordinance) *du 10 pluviôse, an II*, published by M. Maurice Pigallet: *Les Conventionnels en mission dans le Doubs*, in an appendix to the *Annuaire du Doubs*, 1906, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Arrêté du 21 nivôse, an II*: "In districts where there are furnaces or iron-works requisitioned by the Republic, the administrators shall take the most active measures to ascertain the amount of forage, horses and harness required by the proprietors, besides the provision necessary for feeding the workmen and miners, and shall give all necessary orders for reserving for or supplying to the proprietors everything required for the upkeep of their furnaces, iron-works, coal transport works or mines, so that they shall not go short, and so as to supply their workmen with provisions for at least a month at a time . . . etc."

like steel . . .”<sup>1</sup>; he authorised him to fell thirty *arpents* (acres) of woodland,<sup>2</sup> in short he gave the same friendly treatment to Rochet as to Tréfous.

The sale of the splendid furniture which the Dukes of Württemberg had accumulated in their country houses at Montbéliard and Etupes caused a scandal which roused the inhabitants of the region to indignation.

The auction began even before the inventory was complete. Bernard took part in the bidding. He bought one of the Duke’s carriages for 300 livres in *assignats*, more than a thousand livres’ worth of table-linen, a large number of pieces of china, etc. The auctioneer would announce: “At such a price for the representative,” and all bidding was naturally silenced.<sup>3</sup> The retired actor, Naudet, the representative’s factotum—possibly his man of straw on this occasion—had more than 3,000 livres’ worth of arm-chairs, easy-chairs, chiffoniers and curtains knocked down to him, but he bought, in particular, “almost for nothing,” as M. L. Sahler says, “little pictures, engravings, mosaics, artistic pottery, bronze and marble statuettes and busts, porcelain or agate goblets, medallions and miniatures, carved ivory vases, pyramids, carved and gilt consoles or stands.”<sup>4</sup> “There were enough of them to stock several shops,” says the same writer. Nor was friend Rochet forgotten. Carved wooden bedsteads, damask curtains, tapestries, pier-glasses, gilded chests of drawers, tiled stoves, chairs and sofas, eight cabriolets, divans, etc., are his share of the spoils. Friend Tréfous was absent; but the thoughtful Bernard bore him

<sup>1</sup> Letter of October 13, 1793, to the Convention, M. Pigallet, *Arrêts de Bernard*, etc., p. 57 of the separate publication.

<sup>2</sup> L. Sahler, *Notes sur Montbéliard*, 1905, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See Sahler, *op. cit.*, for the details of the biddings.

<sup>4</sup> Sahler, p. 29.



in mind. A number of things were withdrawn from the sale and set aside for his benefit ; eighteen cut-glass lustres, a dozen cut-glass candlesticks, various busts and columns, a whole library of German works—all for about 4,000 livres, of course payable in *assignats*. Bernard carried his solicitude so far as to have Tréfous' furniture loaded on to five carts. He requisitioned artillery horses to draw three of them to Bâle, while Rochet lent his horses to drive the other two to the same destination. The departure of these carts gave rise to a scene. Ignoring the written permission given by Bernard to the carters, Citizen Bouillon, national agent for the district of Montbéliard, tried to prevent the departure of these loads. But this brought him no good, for Bernard dismissed him, by an order of the 1st Pluviôse, replacing him by one of his favourites, the bankrupt Petitcolas, now Pury.

Citizen Viennot cannot have had much difficulty in convincing the brothers Robespierre that Bernard of Saintes stood for financial terrorism in the Haute-Saône.

The younger Robespierre was to return to the Army of Italy to rejoin Ricord and Salicetti. It was decided that he should turn aside to Vesoul on his way to his destination. He had no special mission in Haute-Saône. He was given no powers on his departure by the Committee of Public Safety. It was arranged that he should travel first as a tourist, in order to review the situation and verify Citizen Viennot's story *de visu* and *de auditu*. Humbert, the elder Robespierre's former school-fellow, had a brother at Vesoul, who had been a *procureur* under the *ancien régime*. This brother was absent from the town at the time. He had come to Paris, no doubt to keep Viennot company. The younger Robespierre could take advantage of

his absence to take up his quarters in his house. So as not to irritate Bernard's susceptibilities, he wrote to him announcing his arrival, and asking for a meeting with him at Vesoul.

Bernard, who was at odds with the People's Society of Montbéliard, and knew how influential Robespierre the younger was in Government circles, eagerly accepted the invitation thus extended to him. He advised the Committee of Public Safety of it on the 30th Nivôse. But he did not set out for Vesoul without some uneasiness. On the very day on which he had dismissed Bouillon, the national agent of Montbéliard, for the crime of opposing Tréfous' transactions, Bouillon had had the courage to answer that a fresh representative of the people had arrived in the department of Haute-Saône who would call him to account for his conduct.<sup>1</sup>

Bernard considered this language in the highest degree seditious, and took it into consideration among the reasons stated in his order of dismissal: "Whereas . . . to depreciate a representative of the people and to pour contempt upon his orders in his absence, counting upon the arrival of another, is the act of a base and servile soul, of one capable even of treason!" He might have been wondering whether the younger Robespierre had not already listened to all the complaints of which his conduct in Haute-Saône had been the object, especially as Robespierre had arrived at Vesoul in the company of Viennot. But, whatever his sentiments may then have been, he kept them to himself.

He met Robespierre at Vesoul on the 3rd Pluviôse (January 22), 1794. That very evening they both attended the People's Society. The president's chair, which had already been occupied

<sup>1</sup> *Arrêté de Bernard* of the 1st Pluviôse.

by Robespierre, was offered to Bernard. The discussion turned upon the administrators who had been dismissed or imprisoned on a charge of federalism. Their partisans in the Society, who were many, pleaded their cause warmly. "What is federalism?" asked a citizen. "It is a project for crumbling the great republic, one and indivisible, into a dust of little autonomous republics. This project has never taken root in the minds of the administrators of Haute-Saône. By their decree of June 14, 1793, they proposed to provide the Convention with the liberty and security which they considered that it lacked. Far from having any idea of destroying the centre of government, they desired to strengthen it and place it beyond all harm." The proof was so convincing that nobody rose to answer. Joly himself, the agent and vizier of Bernard of Saintes, admitted that the dismissed magistrates had only been "mistaken," and voted in favour of their being set at liberty. Then Robespierre, after exchanging a few words with Bernard, summed up the conclusions of the debate as follows: "Those in whose fate you have interested yourselves were not guilty; I am glad to see that my colleague is of my own opinion. He empowers me to declare that we shall take measures satisfactory to everybody."<sup>1</sup> Bernard added a few words on his own account. He alluded to "the highly venial causes which, in one way or another, may have led him into some error," and himself drew up on the spot the order for the release of the dismissed ex-administrators. All was joy

<sup>1</sup> *Procès-verbaux des principales séances de la société populaire de Vesoul, auxquelles ont assisté les représentants Robespierre le jeune et Bernard de Saintes* (Minutes of the chief sessions of the People's Society at Vesoul, at which were present the representatives Robespierre the younger and Bernard of Saintes), in A. Lods, pp. 158-9.

and harmony, and Bernard seemed quite won over to Robespierre's ideas of clemency.<sup>1</sup> He invited him to dinner that same evening, and they parted next day, to all appearance the best of friends. Bernard returned to Montbéliard. He was still all for indulgence. On the 10th Pluviôse (January 27), he restored to his position on the district administration Citizen Berger, whom he had dismissed at the same time as Bouillon for his attitude in the matter of Tréfous' carts. On the same day he compensated Bouillon by appointing him national commissary attached to the district tribunal.<sup>2</sup> Did he, perhaps, hope by these measures of reparation to forestall the denunciations which he dreaded?

During this time the younger Robespierre was taking his ease at Vesoul. He had none of his brother's melancholy austerity. The fair sex had its charm for him. He had brought with him a Creole lady, Citoyenne La Saudraye, the wife of an academician, who liked the place, and informed Viennot of her intention to buy the estate of La Montoyotte, in the neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Les citoyens composant la commune de Vesoul, réunis en société populaire, à Bernard de Saintes sur son compte-rendu de la partie critiquée de sa mission*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Arrêtés de Bernard*, published by M. Pigallet.

<sup>3</sup> See the interesting letter of Boisot, the national agent, to Citoyenne La Saudraye dated from Vesoul, 1st Germinal (March 21), 1794, in Lods, pp. 180-2. In a memorial dated Pluviôse, Year IV, Mme de La Saudraye relates that her husband has been dead for nine months: so he was still alive when she accompanied Robespierre to Franche-Comté; that he had an income of 15,000 livres before the Revolution, but had lost all his property, and particularly a residence which he owned in Santo Domingo, which was burned down on September 2, 1792. He had lived in France for twenty years, and was passionately addicted to literature. As for the widow, she had nobody left but a few relations in the colonies, who were ruined. Her whole fortune consisted of a little house in a suburb of Sens, an income of 2,000 livres, and the sale of part of her husband's library (*Catalogue of the Charavay Autographs*, 1862, p. 274).



Charles Nodier, who saw this woman on Robespierre's arm, says that he thought her "neither beautiful nor pretty," but none the less her appearance produced a profound impression upon him. "There was something searching, caustic and almost infernal in her look and smile."<sup>1</sup>

But Robespierre was not only exploring the Carte de Tendre. He was talking and collecting information. On all hands the relatives of suspects were sending in petitions to him, to which he could not give satisfaction because he had no powers in Haute-Saône. He sent an account of the situation to the Committee of Public Safety. The Committee then granted him, by a decree of the 5th Pluviôse (January 25), the same powers as Bernard, Duroy and Lejeune had previously received, for the duration of his stay in the departments of Haute-Saône, Doubs and Jura.<sup>2</sup> From this moment Augustin Robespierre hesitated no more. He signed hundreds of orders of release, one after the other. The prisons were emptied. Freedom for the suspects who had been imprisoned for the sole reason that they had attended the services held by non-juring priests: "these opinions must be kept distinct from the Revolution;" freedom for the farmers, the work of whose hands was necessary for sowing the fields; freedom for those who had only been arrested for idle talk: in proportion as the revolutionary government shows itself "terrible to the guilty, it must come to the aid of the weak, the timid and the misguided"<sup>3</sup>; freedom

<sup>1</sup> Charles Nodier, *Souvenirs*, t. I (1872), p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> The order is signed Collot d'Herbois, Barère, Jeanbon Saint-André, Billaud-Varenne and Maximilien Robespierre. The preamble states that the younger Robespierre had betaken himself to Haute-Saône in order to collect such information for the Committee as circumstances had rendered necessary.

<sup>3</sup> Ordinance of 18th Pluviôse, in Ph. Maréchal, *La Révolution*

for the aged and infirm who are "in such a bad state of health, that by confining them to their houses, public safety is guaranteed and the objects of the law attained"; freedom for those imprisoned merely on account of their family connections; freedom for the Citizens Coucy, mother and daughter, arrested as wife and daughter of a noble, "in view of the fact that they have never displayed unpatriotic sentiments"; freedom for the relatives of those defending their country; freedom for Citizen Delisle, the mother of five children, and on the point of being brought to bed, "in view of the fact," says the order, "that her condition entitles her to humane treatment"; freedom for Charlotte Dard of Faverney, "because she may have been led astray by listening to the persons in whose service she was," etc., etc.

Moreover, Robespierre did not act without discrimination. Among the prisoners he drew a distinction between those who were to enjoy complete freedom, those who were to be confined within the territory of the commune, those who were to be confined to their houses, and those who were compelled to leave the neighbourhood and return to their place of origin.<sup>1</sup> He made enquiries of the People's Societies. He requested the Society at Jussey to enlighten his mind "with regard to the various arrests which have taken place in the communes of that *arrondissement*"; and the Society obediently appointed commissaries to visit each of them "with a view to ascertaining the truth, and separating the real culprits from the misguided or mistaken

*dans la Haute-Saône*, p. 287. We have published the ordinances issued by Robespierre the younger in *Annales révolutionnaires*, 1916, t. VIII, pp. 79-130.

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting ordinance of 22nd Pluviôse reproduced in facsimile by M. Ph. Maréchal.

farmers." At Luxeuil, which he visited in person on the 22nd Pluviôse, he consulted all the assembled inhabitants, and took a vote of the Committee of Surveillance of the commune on each prisoner separately. At Menoux, a little commune in the canton of Amance, he was prompted to do justice, he says, "by the exclamation of a child, who, on catching sight of the representative of the people, called out: 'Ah! Here they come to give us justice!'" He assembled the inhabitants in the *place* and questioned them, and on his return to Vesoul, he signed orders releasing the fifteen suspects in the parish.<sup>1</sup> He did not discharge everybody, but kept dangerous persons under bolts and bars. On learning that he had mistakenly shown too much generosity, he admitted his mistake, and spontaneously sent back to prison the persons whom he had let out, by an order of the 24th Pluviôse which ran as follows:

"Whereas our good faith has been abused with regard to the discharge from prison of Joyaudet, Roussey and Tabourey, resident in the commune of Gourgeon; and whereas the first-named is a brother of two priests who have emigrated, and has given no proofs of patriotism, but, on the contrary, has joined the aristocratic party in his commune with a view to stifling dawning patriotism there; whereas the second has been deprived of the office of mayor by Michaud and Siblot, representatives of the people, on account of his suspicious conduct and the abominable incidents which took place in the commune of Gourgeon while he was mayor; and whereas the third, whose son, a volunteer in the republican armies, is a deserter, also holds notoriously anti-patriotic opinions: whereas

<sup>1</sup> Ph. Maréchal, pp. 284-5.

the different charges brought against these three persons are affirmed and related in a denunciation drawn up by the People's Society of Jussey; whereas this denunciation is entirely borne out by the bad spirit prevailing in this commune, and confirmed by the desertion of the twelve volunteers furnished by it, who have escaped abroad: we declare that our order for the release of Joyaudet, Roussey and Tabourey is null and void; and we give orders that they shall once more be placed under arrest in the house of detention of this commune on the initiative of the national agent of Jussey."<sup>1</sup>

Robespierre was prepared to be indulgent, but he wished it to be understood that his indulgence would be exercised in accordance with the interests of the Republic alone. He applied, in the main, in Franche-Comté, the policy which his brother would have liked to extend to the whole of France, when, on the 30th Frimaire, he carried the decree—which so soon became a dead letter—appointing a commission to sort out the prisoners.

This policy, which was generous without being weak, met with a complete success among the people. In all quarters Robespierre the younger won affection for the Convention and applause for the Mountain. But this policy ran counter to the interests and self-esteem of too many of the petty despots of a day for them to resign themselves to it without a struggle.

The releases of prisoners ordered by the younger Robespierre amounted to so many criticisms of those who had imprisoned all these innocent or harmless persons. The terrorists, who thought they were saving France by casting suspects into prison by hundreds, were now handed over to the derisive criticism of public opinion and

<sup>1</sup> Ph. Maréchal, p. 295.



the vengeful rancour of their victims. Their anger, arising as much from fear as from conviction, was first demonstrated at the Club at Besançon, from which had started the emissaries sent out all over the province by Bernard in October 1793, in order to purge the administrative bodies, draw up lists of suspects and infuse new life into the People's Societies. Among the Jacobins of the club there were ardent young men, in a hurry to make a career, and embarrassed by no scruples. They formed a group centring on a newspaper of a combative character, the *Vedette*, which knew how to inspire enthusiasm for ideas, and still more for persons. Up to this time this group had formed the headquarters of the deputies on mission, collecting information for them and acting as their executive agents. They now scented danger. Briot, aged twenty, formerly literature master at the communal secondary school, was the editor of the *Vedette*, in conjunction with the ex-abbé Dormoy. He had been on friendly terms with Charles Hesse, known as "General Marat," who had been the officer commanding at Besançon in 1792; but he afterwards went over to the Girondin party, and made fun of Robespierre's deism at the end of 1792. At the time of the King's trial he at first maintained that the Convention could not constitute itself a tribunal; then, all of a sudden, he applauded the condemnation of Louis XVI. On the eve of May 31 the sections of Besançon had sent him to Paris to encourage the Girondins in the name of all honest men; he censured the revolt of the Mountain, then suddenly began to sing its praises. In order to avoid conscription, with which he was threatened owing to his age, he managed to worm himself into the confidence of General Reed, who was in command of the



division; he was appointed his aide-de-camp, although he had never seen service. He had since been seen brandishing his sabre in the clubs of the surrounding region, threatening, eliminating and imprisoning the Feuillants. He accompanied Bernard of Saintes on his expedition to Montbéliard, and Bernard commissioned him to stock his cellar for him.<sup>1</sup> Briot next joined in the violences of the Hébertists. In the *Vedette* he paraded his raging fury against everything connected with priests or religion. This did not prevent him from keeping on good terms with the fashionable society of Besançon, which he took under his protection. The Committee of Public Safety had deprived of his rank Adjutant-General Viennot, the brother of the famous Count Viennot-Vaublanc, who had been one of the leaders of the Right in the Legislative Assembly, but had emigrated; Bernard of Saintes, no doubt at the instigation of Briot, undertook the defence of this officer, and wrote to the Committee of Public Safety, on October 15, 1793, that he was not a noble, but was loathed by his family as a republican, and was, moreover, the darling of the sans-culottes of Besançon.<sup>2</sup> Viennot-Vaublanc kept his position, and the Briot clique had this brother of an *émigré* elected president of the People's Society of Besançon. This same Briot, who was so hard on the Feuillants and federalists, took under his protection a noble, Joseph Droz de Rozel, who was afterwards to

<sup>1</sup> See a requisition order signed Briot: "In the name of the Representative of the people, Citizen Fallot, opposite the Market, is required to furnish for the headquarters of the armed forces at Montbéliard twelve bottles of his best red wine, for which he will be given a credit on the moneys accruing from the sale of the real estate of the erstwhile prince. Signed: Briot, aide-de-camp" (A. Lods, p. 343).

<sup>2</sup> A. Lods, p. 142.

make his name as an academician, but was at that time known for little more than the royalist sentiments which he had ostentatiously displayed before August 10. Before the insurrection he had gone so far as to offer his services to Louis XVI. But having been converted to Jacobinism by his patron Briot, Joseph Droz actually wrote to him during Robespierre's mission that everything ought to be settled by the sword,<sup>1</sup> and that an army should be formed in the department of Doubs to hunt down suspects in the hills. The abbé Dormoy, who was then Briot's second-in-command, frequented the society of the former counsellors of the Parlement, and obtained the release of one of them, named Maire; he married his daughter, who brought him a large dowry. Such were the inexorable terrorists of Besançon who were shocked by the younger Robespierre's indulgence and prepared to obstruct it.

The representative Lejeune had just arrived at Besançon to replace Bernard of Saintes, whom the Committee of Public Safety was sending to Dijon. Lejeune, a sincere Jacobin, who had attracted attention by his motion in favour of closing the theatres, and setting up forges in the public squares where the people would see the "arms of vengeance" wrought—Lejeune, a stranger in the neighbourhood, was soon hoodwinked by the clique which dominated the People's Society. On the very morrow of his arrival at Besançon, on the 6th Pluviôse (January 25), 1794, he reported to the Committee of Public Safety that "fanaticism was still deeply rooted, especially in the hills." He added that "ill-disposed persons, secret enemies of the Revolution and emissaries of the coalition of tyrants, make

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 22nd Pluviôse (February 10, 1794) in Sauzay, *Histoire de la persécution dans le Doubs*, t. V, p. 309.

use of this means to mislead the inhabitants of the country districts, and turn the departments of Jura and Doubs into a second Vendée. The heads of several of these villains, including some priests, have already fallen on the scaffold." It was a promising letter.

Bernard of Saintes, who had left Montbéliard for Dijon on the 10th Pluviôse, stopped at Besançon on his way, and did not fail to visit his colleague Lejeune, who blamed him for the weakness he had shown in releasing the suspects in a body at Vesoul and Montbéliard. Bernard excused himself by putting the blame on the younger Robespierre. On the 12th Pluviôse the two representatives attended the People's Society. Briot's friends demanded an explanation from Bernard of his conduct towards the end of his mission. They blamed him in particular for dismissing the district administration of Saint-Hippolyte, which had been composed of terrorists, and sending some of them before the criminal tribunal of Vesoul.<sup>1</sup> Bernard "explained in detail the reasons which had forced him to be severe to men whom the People's Society defended as true republicans."<sup>2</sup> The partisans of Briot replied that he had allowed himself to be deceived by schemers. After a prolonged discussion, which we can well imagine to have been acrimonious, the view which finally prevailed was that supported by Lejeune, who advocated severity. It was decided that the Society should appoint commissaries to "wait upon the representative at Vesoul [that is to say, the younger Robespierre], and present to him simultaneously the

<sup>1</sup> Sauzay, t. V, p. 324. The Jacobins of Besançon protested against this dismissal by a letter to the Jacobin Club at Paris, which referred it to the Committee of General Security (*Vedette* of 13th Pluviôse, Year II).

<sup>2</sup> *Vedette* of 13th Pluviôse, Year II.

Society's protests and the vote of Lejeune and Bernard." Lejeune spoke, "like a staunch republican, of the errors of his colleague [Bernard] in the course of action which he had followed at Vesoul, and blamed him for a moment of weakness." Bernard abased himself before Lejeune as he had done a few days earlier before Robespierre. He himself admitted his errors, "in a grand and generous manner," to use the words of the *Vedette*, and called upon patriots to denounce him. A few days later, on the 17th Pluviôse (February 5), 1794, in a letter written from Dijon to the Committee of Public Safety, he blamed himself "for having co-operated with his colleague Robespierre the younger in releasing all the administrators of the department of Haute-Saône and of the district and municipality of Vesoul, whom he had imprisoned after removing them from office for passing federalist motions in connection with the days of May 31 and June 2"; he represented the People's Society of Vesoul as a "society worse than moderate, which admitted the clergy to membership, and had never been able to denounce aristocrats, but had rather taken a warm interest in their fate, and given them certificates of civism; a society which had been base enough to escort the prisoners in triumphal procession on their release, and hail them as saviours of that Republic which they had desired to ruin; a society which showed its approval when twelve priests, masked in dominos, had paraded the dead through the streets with candles, crosses and lanterns, deafening the citizens with their dismal croakings." On the same day he wrote the sans-culottes of Montbéliard a letter in the same spirit, in which he did his best to rouse them against that policy of weakness which he blamed himself for having momentarily followed :



“To the shame of old France be it spoken, I have not found on my travels the same energy and exalted patriotism as at Montbéliard. I have seen crosses on the roads, and men and women wearing no national cockades, whom I have put in prison. I have seen priests masked in dominos, lighting the dead and the living in broad daylight, with candles, crape and other such vile tricks which are no longer known to you; I heard myself called *Monsieur*, and ‘you’ being used for ‘thou’ at every turn; and, in this amazing situation, I exclaimed: ‘Where is my little Montbéliard, where everything is as it should be?’ And I sent everybody there for lessons in civism. Upon my word, this does you great honour and ought to give you fresh energy.

“On arriving at Dijon, however, I am pleased to see a revival of patriotism and reason; for the first request made to me by the administrative bodies, which I myself created, was that I should order the churches to be closed and the priests expelled. You may take it that, though I cannot issue such an order, I shall none the less find a means of satisfying these good people.

“My first random shot here was to take up my quarters in the house of Crœsus Micault, President of the Parlement, and my scent was not at fault; for besides the fact that the cellar is stocked with very good wine, it so happens that there were a few little coats of arms there, which have enabled me to confiscate this superb mansion for the benefit of the nation. So I have made a good haul, which will, I hope, be followed by a few others; and, what is more, I am sending to Luxeuil to fetch the master and have him condemned as an *émigré*. If this happens, an income of 400,000 livres will fall to the national coffers.

“My friends, I need say no more, except to beg

you to keep up your good reputation, in which my own self-respect is bound up as much as yours.”<sup>1</sup>

As may be well imagined, the *Tape-durs* (hard-hitters) of the department of Doubs handed Bernard's letter round, and they now began to represent the younger Robespierre as a covert protector of aristocrats and priests. At the same date the Hébertists were representing Robespierre the elder as a Feuillant and a moderate.

To the criticisms of Lejeune and Bernard of Saintes were soon added those of another representative, Duroy, to whom the Committee of Public Safety had entrusted the establishment of a revolutionary government in Haute-Marne and Haute-Saône, by the same ordinance as had sent Bernard of Saintes to the Côte d'Or and Saône-et-Loire (ordinance of the 9th Nivôse). Duroy was a faithful adherent of the Mountain, very zealous and disinterested. After the failure of the revolt of the 1st Prairial, he gave up his life to his ideas. Was he influenced by Lejeune and Bernard of Saintes? Perhaps. He was on his way back from the Army of the Rhine, in which Lacoste and Baudot, Lebas and Saint-Just had raised public spirit to a very high level. It is possible that the contrast which he noticed between the feverish atmosphere of a frontier city like Strasbourg—where life was spent in a state of patriotic tension and in constant suspicion of conspiracy—and the placid calm of a little provincial centre like Vesoul—it is possible that this contrast produced a bad impression upon

<sup>1</sup> A. Lods, pp. 162-3. For the pitiful story of President Micault, who was condemned to death as an *émigré* and executed, when he had not left France, see the article by M. Marion: *Quelques exemples de l'application des lois sur l'émigration* (*Revue historique*, June 1911).

him, and that he was prepared of his own accord to conceive a detrimental opinion of his colleague's course of action. The younger Robespierre himself later admitted that the *procureur* Humbert, the brother of Maximilien's friend, in whose house he stayed at Vesoul, had a bad and unpatriotic reputation, and explained that this circumstance "was instrumental in prejudicing people's minds against him and what he had done."<sup>1</sup>

The fact remains that, after his stay at Vesoul, Duroy wrote a personal letter to Maximilien from Chaumont on the 25th Pluviôse, in the following terms :

"I was grieved to observe that your brother was changed. . . . I told him my views privately. I spoke in a spirit of friendship, sincerity and civism. I saw that he did not understand me. I left him at Vesoul and went on to the department of Haute-Marne, for my principles are not in accord with those which he is now displaying. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In another letter, of the 7th Ventôse, addressed this time to the Committee of Public Safety, Duroy once more referred in even clearer terms to his disagreement with the younger Robespierre. He declared that he could not approve an order concerning provisions issued by Augustin Robespierre on the 24th Pluviôse,<sup>3</sup> and added that,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of the younger Robespierre dated 3rd Ventôse, Year II.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by E. Hamel, t. III, p. 405.

<sup>3</sup> This ordinance must have been very similar to the one issued on the following day, 25th Pluviôse: "In consideration of the return of the provisions required by the district of Lure: and whereas we have been informed that the inhabitants of several communes were obliged to live on oaten bread, since the soil of this district, which produces but little wheat, has been rendered practically unproductive by drought; and whereas its resources in potatoes and other produce which might take

in his opinion, his mission in Haute-Saône ought to have put a stop to that of the younger Robespierre, who should have been with the Army of Italy. But by this date, the 7th Ventôse, Augustin Robespierre had already left Franche-Comté.

Disowned by the three representatives, Lejeune, Bernard of Saintes and Duroy, and accused by the Club of Besançon, Robespierre's brother had drawn from his own conscience the strength to continue his work. The representations made to him after the session of the 12th Pluviôse by the members of the club had produced no effect, for it was after that date that he actually announced the release of most of the prisoners. He probably felt that he was supported and encouraged by the elder Robespierre; for he prolonged his stay in Franche-Comté for yet another three weeks. He found some compensation for the hostility displayed against him by the Besançon terrorists in the more and more numerous marks of friendship which he received from all the other People's Societies.

The society at Gray had been purged in Brumaire by Briot, who had approached it with a disgraceful tendency towards "moderantism"; it had next had leanings in the direction of the Besançon society, with which it kept up neighbourly relations. At the beginning of Pluviôse, at the very outset of the younger Robespierre's mission, it had been agitated by the exactions to which the farmers in the surrounding communes

the place of wheat are almost non-existent: we give orders that the requisitioning which has taken place in this district for the department of Vosges be provisionally suspended: in consequence of which the communes responsible for a quota of the commodities requisitioned are commanded to supply the needs of the other communes, in accordance with the orders which they receive from the district administrative body, under pain of prosecution as rebels against the law" (Ph. Maréchal, p. 201).



were being subjected by the agents responsible for the provisioning of Ville-Affranchie—that is to say, Lyons. These commissaries, furnished with powers from the representatives at Lyons, were making a return of the grain supplies, commandeering them, and forbidding the owners to touch them, sell them, or even draw upon them for their own consumption, under pain of death; “in such a way,” says the club minute-book, “that citizens who have not got certain supplies are bound to need a well-stored barn near by.” They were also committing all sorts of acts of violence, and breaking the images of the saints.<sup>1</sup> The Club, supported by the authorities of Gray, summoned Maillot, the leader of these commissaries, to their bar, examined him, and had him arrested, together with his assistants.

This arrest was a grave step, and they had to make haste and get it approved by the representatives on mission in the region. The Club of Gray’s first idea was to approach Lejeune, who was at Besançon. It sent two of its members, Silvant the elder and the ex-abbé Cournot,<sup>2</sup> as delegates to him, but they were coldly received. Lejeune stated to them that it was his intention to maintain friendly relations with his colleagues on mission at Commune-Affranchie.<sup>3</sup> He sent them away without giving them a satisfactory answer. Disappointed in this quarter, the inhabitants of Gray turned to the younger Robespierre. Cournot, accompanied by Avenne, another member of the Club, set out for Vesoul. They were very well received. The younger Robespierre annulled the requisitions made by

<sup>1</sup> *Registre des délibérations du Club de Gray* (Minutes of the deliberations of the Club of Gray), session of the 9th Pluviôse (Archives of Haute-Saône).

<sup>2</sup> Uncle of the well-known philosopher of the same name.

<sup>3</sup> See Lejeune’s letter, dated the 6th Pluviôse.

Maillot and his agents, but soon afterwards he once more set them at liberty. The grateful inhabitants of Gray invited him to visit their town. He promised to comply with their request. He no doubt already intended to go to Besançon itself to face his enemies. Gray was almost on the way there. Robespierre spent at least two days at Gray, the 25th and 26th Pluviôse.<sup>1</sup> He was received at the Club with "shouts of 'Long live the Republic!' 'Long live the Mountain!' and with unanimous applause." He at once made a speech which left nothing to be desired so far as clearness was concerned: "I have just made known," he said, "the intentions of the Convention: namely, to do justice to all, to relieve the victims of oppression and punish the oppressors, if any such exist." The minutes of the session sum up the rest of his speech as follows:

After drawing a distinction between the representatives of the people, who show themselves to everybody, because they desire to forward everybody's interests; and kings, who hide and isolate themselves from what they call their people, because both the public and private destitution are an indictment against them, "I have come," he added, "to appeal to your hearts, to speak to your virtues, to enquire what are your anxieties and needs. I shall have fulfilled my duty, I shall have satisfied my heart, if I succeed in relieving the unfortunate. Everywhere I have consulted the citizens. I have always acted in accordance with their lights and guidance. I am not afraid of going wrong; the people are never unjust."

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Club of Gray. Before going to Gray he visited Luxeuil on the 22nd Pluviôse. He was back at Vesoul on the 24th Pluviôse.

His peroration was greeted with reiterated bursts of applause. On the following day he summoned the society and all the inhabitants to a meeting in the largest church of the place, and as they kept talking to him of the Maillot affair, he requested the society "never to discuss the question of provisions"—in other words, to eliminate from their debates a burning question which might be an apple of discord. He referred to "the example of the Convention, which never discussed such questions, but worked constantly and spent enormous sums on provisioning the Republic." On the evening of the next day, the 26th Pluviôse, before an immense crowd assembled in the church, Robespierre announced that he had been "sent by the Convention to receive the complaints of the persons under arrest."

"There are some, guilty of a few offences, who seem to have expiated them by several months of detention. There are others, more criminal, who must stay in prison till peace reigns both within and without the Republic, so that all Frenchmen may form but one nation of brothers. Inspired by these sentiments, and showing myself firm and sincere towards these latter culprits, the only feeling I experience or express is a desire to make others happy. The probity and integrity which I have recognized in the Committee of Surveillance prove that all of these prisoners deserved their fate. Kindly tell me, then, which of them are sufficiently punished to deserve their freedom now."

The list of prisoners was next examined. Robespierre consulted the assembly about each one of them. He released almost half the list.

The session came to an end at a quarter to nine, amidst an outburst of sentiment and enthusiasm which was still further heightened by a demonstration of generosity on the part of Citizen Silvant the elder, who begged the representative to restore to one of the discharged suspects the position which he himself occupied. But Robespierre refused to comply with this disinterested request! "Administrative posts should be occupied by men enjoying the confidence of all." Robespierre was escorted to his house to the strains of patriotic songs.

On the next day he went to Besançon, where he met Lejeune. He spent three days with him, and attended three sessions of the People's Society<sup>1</sup>; but this one was far from unanimous. Strong opposition to Briot and Dormoy had made itself felt. It was headed by the members of the Committee of Surveillance, and especially by two of them, the ex-priest Melchior Proudhon<sup>2</sup> and the merchant Piedmontois.<sup>3</sup> These men rallied round Robespierre and encouraged him. Robespierre invited them to his table. On the very first day, the 27th Pluviôse, Robespierre gave an explanation at the club of the accusations which Bernard of Saintes had brought against him. At a previous session, it will be remembered, the club had blamed Bernard for his indulgence, but, satisfied of his repentance, it had decided, on the motion of Rambour, that the censure

<sup>1</sup> According to Briot's pamphlet entitled, *Aux représentants du peuple membres du Comité de Salut public et de Sécurité générale*, dated the 20th Thermidor, Year II, p. 16. The account given by Charles Nodier in his *Souvenirs* is an imaginary one.

<sup>2</sup> Cousin of the famous Socialist.

<sup>3</sup> According to Briot, the Committee of Surveillance of Besançon had had Bernard's trunks sealed on their way through the city, and had denounced Bernard to the Committee of Surveillance of Dijon (see the above-mentioned pamphlet). This is confirmed by the Archives of Côte d'Or.



which it had pronounced upon him should not be entered on the minutes, in order "to bury everything which might tend to create bitterness or discord, and impair the respect due to the representatives of the nation" (session of 23rd Pluviôse, as reported in the *Vedette*). Robespierre's intervention revived the controversy. The session was a stormy one. "The younger Robespierre, in a manuscript report sent to the Committee of Public Safety on the 6th Ventôse, declares that Viennot-Vaublanc, the president of the club, ascended the tribune after him: 'He did not refute a single item in my speech, but he spoke in exalted terms of the high destiny to which I had the right to aspire, so that I was accordingly bound to disdain accusations of any kind whatsoever. The perfidy of this speech forced me to respond by declaring that my destiny was already fulfilled, since I had had the good fortune to serve the cause of liberty; that, with regard to the lofty destiny which had just been held out to me, I accepted the omen, for my country at least; and, as for these accusations, I only rebutted them because it is not enough for a representative of the people to be blameless, he ought also to appear to be so.'"<sup>1</sup> At last the club decided to "give a report of its discussion of the 23rd Pluviôse annulling the minutes of the 12th of the same month concerning the denunciation of the representative Bernard; it shall be presented for reading at the session of the 30th."<sup>2</sup> We can read between the lines that Briot and his friends had made a great effort to hold the club to a policy of severity. But Robespierre persisted. On the next day he received reinforcements from Montbéliard. Without allow-

<sup>1</sup> Document communicated by M. G. Michon.

<sup>2</sup> *Vedette* of the 30th Pluviôse.

ing themselves to be moved by the exaggerated compliments which Bernard had addressed to them from Dijon, the sans-culottes of Montbéliard had, on the contrary, decided to denounce his actions to the neighbouring clubs, and especially to the Club of Vesoul. With this aim in view they had despatched two of their members, Berger and Morel, to Vesoul, to denounce the scandal of the sale of the prince's furniture and the nomination of the fraudulent bankrupt Petitcolas-Pury to the post of national agent.<sup>1</sup>

Having failed to find Robespierre at Vesoul, Berger and Morel went on to Besançon, where they arrived on the 28th Pluviôse about six o'clock in the evening. The discussion on Bernard's case was resumed at the People's Society: "Several members in succession ascended the tribune and attacked Bernard for selling the effects of the former Prince of Montbéliard before the inventory was completed; and for having stopped the preparation of the inventory of the effects of Bishop Schwarzer; for having ordered them to be carried to the château without being checked; for having taken gold and silver articles for himself and his associates, among other things a gold snuff-box, which had been provided by the inhabitants of Montbéliard in payment of the patriotic assessment." The deputies from Montbéliard added further details to these accusations. If Briot is to be believed, the younger Robespierre "heaped insults upon his absent colleague." He even promised "that his head should fall." He "struck terror to the souls of the members of the society, and insulted and threatened one

<sup>1</sup> See the extract from the Minute-book of the People's Society of the Mountain (*Extrait des registres de la société populaire et montagnarde de Montbéliard*), dated the 2nd Ventôse, in A. Lods, pp. 326 seq.

of the only three citizens who dared to defend Bernard.”<sup>1</sup> Lejeune, it appears, next intervened, and had “the courage to defend his colleague against the rabid declamation of Robespierre.” Finally, on the 29th Pluviôse, the deputies from Montbéliard raised the question of Petitcolas-Pury. They raked up the incident of the boxes sent to Bâle by Bernard’s orders. They wound up with an “apostrophe to Robespierre,” of whom they demanded justice in the name of the Society of Montbéliard.<sup>2</sup> We do not know exactly what decision was come to as a result of these scandalous debates, or whether the younger Robespierre issued an order that satisfaction should be given to the complaints which had arisen. It is not correct, as Charles Nodier alleges, that he was deprived of his powers in the department of Doubs. They were even extended to that of Jura. But they were limited by the equal powers of Lejeune, with whom he was bound to confer, and it is probable that the latter shielded the partisans of Bernard of Saintes. But from the silence of the *Vedette* and the lamentations of Briot it is permissible to infer that the final victory rested with Robespierre. Briot declares that in the presence of Catiline’s brother the duty of silence was incumbent upon them. Charles Nodier, who was present at these scenes, tells us—and in this case we may trust his memory—that at the moment of Augustin’s departure, the yard of his inn was “full of women waiting impatiently to present to him the protests of the

<sup>1</sup> See Briot’s pamphlet. The citizen insulted by Robespierre was none other than Briot himself, alluded to contemptuously by Robespierre, in his letter to his brother of the 3rd Ventôse in these terms: “a corrupt editor of a newspaper fabricated in the department of Doubs.” Another opponent was the brother of Vaublanc, who was president of the society (same letter).

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Society of Montbéliard.

prisoners." He declared, it seems, that he could do no more for anybody, but he promised the agitated crowd that he would lay their complaint before the Convention, that he would "unmask to them the unjust and horrible severities of the proconsuls," and ended with this phrase, that Nodier could not have forgotten: "I will return here with the golden bough of victory, or I will die for you; for I am going to defend at the same time my own life and that of your relatives." Making all allowance for rhetoric and romanticism, the fact remains that, in the very stronghold of terrorism, Robespierre had silenced Bernard and his partisans; and that he left Besançon carrying his head high, and leaving behind him the regrets of the crowd and the gratitude of wise and sincere Jacobins. He was at Lyons on the 3rd Ventôse, and advised his brother of the despatch of a report of his mission in Franche-Comté. In this same letter he spurned the accusations of "moderantism" brought against him, of which "that petty, immoral creature" Bernard had made himself the instrument. He despised "his stupid denunciation." And he ended by defining the guiding principle which had inspired his actions in the following noble and high-minded words:

"Nothing is easier than to keep up one's revolutionary reputation at the expense of the innocent. Inferior men find by this means a veil for hiding all their rash deeds; but an upright man saves the innocent at the cost of his reputation. I have acquired my reputation solely in order to do good, and I desire to spend it in defending the innocent. Do not fear that I shall let myself be mollified by private considerations, or by sentiments foreign to the public weal.



The salvation of my country, this is my guide ; political morality, this is my means. It is this morality which I have fed, fostered and inspired in every mind. In the countries which I have traversed the cries of ' Long live the Mountain ! ' are sincere. Be sure that I have caused the Mountain to be adored, and that there are still regions which as yet only fear it, which do not know it, and which only lack a representative worthy of his mission, and able to raise the people instead of demoralising them. There is a scheme afoot for inducing the people to level all things ; if we are not careful, everything will become disorganized." <sup>1</sup>

In these words, like a good prophet, he foretells the demoralization and disorganization of Thermidor.

After the departure of the younger Robespierre, the terrorists, whom his presence had curbed, gradually plucked up fresh courage. As early as the 3rd Ventôse, his friend Viennot the chemist was imprisoned at Vesoul on Bernard's denunciation, and kept in prison for three months by order of the Committee of General Security. The Popular Society of Vesoul protested against this arrest, and sent a delegation to Paris to save him from the guillotine. The national agent Boisot, who expected to be arrested in his turn, wrote to Robespierre the younger describing the anxieties of his friend. In order to make more sure of a hearing, he also wrote, a few days later, a long and touching letter to Mme de la Saudraye requesting her intercession.

" They are trying to scare us every day by announcing the arrival of Citizen Bernard. They

<sup>1</sup> Letter published at the end of Courtois's report of the 16th Nivôse, Year III, p. 293.

say he has been given another mission to this department. Certain men are strutting round joyfully ; they have smiling faces, and are looking forward to pleasures of a kind worthy of them. The proscription list is already drawn up. Eighty of us are marked down as victims. Their vengeance will know no bounds ; it is an iron sceptre which is bound to crush us. Everybody with any courage, austerity, principles or virtue ; everybody who has not, like him and his partisans, embraced the Republic as a profession, and the Revolution as a source of profit and a means of gaining power by intrigue ; but who loves the country and freedom, and is on the side of the people's happiness : all these men will be sacrificed. It is the revenge of crime upon virtue ; it is a conspiracy of vice against morality ; it is a miniature edition, directed against us, of Hébert & Co.'s conspiracy against public freedom. As for my own private opinion, I have no doubt that this corrupt person, devoid of virtue and morality, sunk in debauchery and disgusting by his excesses of every kind, is really on the side of the foreigner, who, unable to conquer the Republic by force of arms, desires to annihilate liberty by the corruption of morals and provoke the people to revolt by tyranny and crying injustice."

Such a letter, as to the sincerity of whose tone there can be no doubt, reveals to us the very soul of those Robespierrists who in the provinces, as in Paris, represented what was best, sanest and most upright in the revolutionary party.

The younger Robespierre interceded with his brother, and Bernard did not return to Franche-Comté. In his letters to Maximilien, dated from

Nice on the 6th and 16th Germinal,<sup>1</sup> he reverted to Bernard of Saintes in the same terms as Boisot of Vesoul. Like him, he compares Bernard to the Hébertists: "I have not followed the system of those immoral and perverted men who affect the pose of philosophers so as to hide their absence of morality and virtue, who tear down a cross so that their crimes and embezzlements shall pass unnoticed." Remarkable words, and more just than is supposed! He sings the praises of Viennot and Boisot, "disinterested and capable men," of the judge Galmiche, "an upright and talented man."<sup>2</sup> He begs his brother to have Bernard recalled to the bosom of the Convention, and lets him know that he is writing to the Committee of General Security a letter, of which he sends him a copy, in which he intercedes in favour of Viennot.<sup>3</sup>

In Doubs, as in Haute-Saône, the Jacobins who had supported the younger Robespierre were harassed after his departure. Briot's coterie, which had been very much shaken at first,<sup>4</sup> gradually regained confidence. It managed to surmount Lejeune's hesitations, and, under the

<sup>1</sup> Analysed by Hector Fleischmann in an appendix to the *Memoirs of Charlotte Robespierre*, pp. 352 and 353. The letter of the 16th Germinal, which formed part of the Benjamin Filon collection, is published *in extenso* in the Catalogue of the Morrison collection, Vol. V., pp. 284-5.

<sup>2</sup> Boisot, Viennot and Galmiche appear in the list of applicants for places found among Robespierre's papers. But the name of Galmiche has been distorted into Garnerin (Courtois's Report, Nivôse, Year III, p. 139).

<sup>3</sup> This letter was published in the *Annales révolutionnaires*, 1917, t. IX, pp. 114-16.

<sup>4</sup> If the pamphlet entitled *Quand la Perruque a fait son tems* (When the wig has served its time) is to be believed, which is the work of a very well-informed person (it appeared in the Year III), Briot wrote the younger Robespierre two letters to Besançon begging his pardon. "You wrote him some others to the Army of Italy, which were a masterpiece of cowardice. And the latter are in existence, my good friend, you understand me!"

pretext that the two men at the head of the Committee of Surveillance, Proudhon and Piedmontois, were hostile to the Swiss colony which Bassal had established in a convent, transformed for the purpose into a clock factory, it had them deprived of their position on the 14th Messidor of the Year II.<sup>1</sup> But Piedmontois and Proudhon were energetic men who did not hesitate to appeal to the club, at which they appeared once again, in spite of being under surveillance, and to the Committee of Public Safety, of which they demanded a hearing.<sup>2</sup>

We have no difficulty in sharing Charles Nodier's belief that the news of the events of the 9th Thermidor plunged the great majority of the republicans of Franche-Comté into a stupor of anxiety and indignation. "Alas!" they said to each other, "What will become of us? Our trials are not at an end, since we have still some friends and relatives left, and the Robespierre brothers are dead!" And Charles Nodier adds this phrase, which is the historic truth: "This fear was not unjustified, for Robespierre's party had fallen a victim to the party of the Terror." But so great is human cowardice, that the self-same clubs which had applauded the younger Robespierre, which had escorted him, wreathed in flowers, and which had wept for joy at his orders for release, hastened after Thermidor to congratulate his conquerors, among whom naturally figured Bernard of Saintes.

<sup>1</sup> *Arrêtés* of Lejeune, published by M. Pigallet.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives nationales*, F7. 3822 (Report of the General Police Board, 5th Thermidor).



## CHAPTER II

### A LETTER FROM RÉGIS DESHORTIES TO THE YOUNGER ROBESPIERRE

THE following letter is preserved among the residue of the younger Robespierre's papers in the National Archives (Fr. 4433). Ernest Hamel quoted a few lines of it in his *Histoire*, t. III, p. 640. It contributes towards our better knowledge of Robespierre's family and surroundings at Arras, and is worth knowing for this reason.

The writer, Régis Deshorties, was the son,<sup>1</sup> by his first marriage, of a former notary of Arras, Robert Deshorties, who married as his second wife Marie-Eléonore-Eulalie, an aunt of Robespierre's on the father's side, and died on December 6, 1792.

Charlotte Robespierre stated in her memoirs that Robert Deshorties had several daughters by his first marriage, and that the elder Robespierre was fond of one of them; he was intending to marry her, when he was elected deputy to the States-General. But the inconstant girl would not wait for his return. She married another during his absence. The elder Robespierre seems to have been much grieved at this betrayal. But we can see from Régis's letter that he none the less remained on excellent terms with the Deshorties family.

ARRAS, 30th *Messidor*, Year II.

"MY FELLOW-TOWNSMAN AND FRIEND,

What a long time it is since I received a letter from you; while recovering from a long

<sup>1</sup> Not the brother, as Ernest Hamel supposed.

and serious illness about five months ago, I wrote you a long epistle to Paris, which, to all appearance, never reached you ; for I learnt shortly afterwards that you were no longer in the great city at the time when my letter reached it. Since then I might have doubted whether you were alive, had not the goddess with the hundred voices, in making public the capture of Toulon and the heroic deeds of the French Republicans, informed me at the same time how much you had contributed by your example towards stimulating the activity of our soldiers. Subsequently to this memorable time you pursued your military career, and went so far away that I, who had for so long a time no horizon save the limits of my room, thought you were at the world's end. Now that you have returned to the banks of the Seine, I hope that you will be good enough to devote so much as a quarter of an hour to communicating with me, and giving me some sign of your existence, both moral and physical. I greatly regret that I did not get to Paris a few days later ; I should have had the tender satisfaction of embracing you ; but I am never lucky in anything, and all that is granted to me is that I should be able to enjoy the pleasures of my fellow-men, with whom I easily identify myself. Charlotte Robespierre had promised to let me know at once when you arrived in the capital. Having received no letter from her, either on this subject or about another letter of which she ought to have acknowledged the receipt, I imagined (as several persons had assured me) that you were coming to Arras, and that that was the reason of your sister's silence. If it is possible that my hopes are to be realized, I urge you, in the name of our friendship, to come and stay with Régis. You remember that, in one of your previous

letters, you requested me most cordially to preserve my friendship for you: you won it a long time ago, my dear Bonbon, but I warn you that you will only keep it on the conditions which I have just laid down. But if I am to be disappointed in these delightful expectations, I shall try to comfort myself with the thought that the true friends of their country ought to sacrifice to her even their most natural feelings of affection. If it is not possible for you to come and see your friends, tell me how long you expect to stay in Paris. I will come up and talk to you about a question which concerns me, as well as my co-heirs, and is still being considered by the administration of our district. I have left a memorial for you in the hands of Citoyenne Charlotte.

If you see Isabelle Canone before I have written to her, tell her that she will shortly receive a letter from me. I must undoubtedly be very busy to be unable to find a moment to answer her two last letters. Now would be the time to talk to you of my journey to Paris, if I were not quite sure that somebody has taken care to inform you of it, and that a lady citizen, who is in herself worth more than a whole committee, had added some lively and half-caustic comments. However that may be, I have given Citoyenne Canone a great proof of devotion, such, I venture to say, as none of her friends would have been ready to do in her present circumstances. Yet I have had the grief of seeing that, of all the people who knew of the step I was taking, she was the one least touched by it. This undeniable indifference will not prevent me from making myself useful to her and serving her with equal zeal whenever the opportunity arises, for it is in my nature to do services to the unfortunate to the full extent of my power. From the way in which she informs me that she proposes to return

to Arras, I understand that it does not form part of her plans to give her friends a chance to express an opinion, even in those matters on which they have a right to give one, and in which their advice might be of some use to her.

What message shall I give you for Maximilien ? Shall I ask you to give him my kind regards ? But where will you find him as a private individual ? Entirely bound up in the country and the great interests of humanity as a whole, Robespierre no longer exists for his friends. The human race, in subjection to the caste of tyrants, owes endless obligations to men of this stamp ; but the impressionable man, the disciple of Fénelon and Jean-Jacques, feels that earth would be a desert to him if it had none but men of this character for inhabitants.

Let us turn to less serious matters. All our friends are well. The worthy Buissart, the prophet of the Revolution, who, relying upon the infallibility of his political barometers (for he has all kinds of them), always likes to think that he has foretold the most important events six months in advance, the man who announced two months ago the ruin of the city of Arras, which the revolutionary government, like fiery lava, as he put it, was about to transform into an ash-strewn desert : well, the worthy Buissart is still alive ; he is waiting resignedly till it shall please the legislative power—I mean his wife—to come back and honour him with her presence. He hopes that when she has given the Committee of Public Safety all that information which her deep knowledge of politics guarantees to be accurate, she will consent to return to her Penates, and once more take up the reins of domestic government, resuming the occupations which the creator of nature has especially assigned to women. The doctor of Montpellier



is fairly well for a septuagenarian, and retains his boisterous spirits to the last. Your relative Duruts and his family enjoy perfect health. I think the same is the case with your uncle Carault and his children. One of your girl cousins was on the point of getting married a month ago. Everything was arranged, the day fixed, and her brothers summoned, when all at once a contrary wind sprang up, and the cherished lover saw his hopes engulfed in the stormy sea of [words obscured by a tear in the paper] women. Ah, what a terrible fellow Shetonien is, my dear Bonbon; he is a hard nut to crack. The elder Carault girl is pleasant and has a very nice nature. I have sometimes been tempted to enter myself, but the formidable Tonien, with his ale, has always put me out of countenance.

To leave such an important subject and say something about our victories is a happy transition. The successes of our arms would indeed be miraculous if we could for a moment forget what a difference there is between a slave fighting for his master and a citizen fighting for freedom. Although my heart swells at the news of every victory, I confess that I am not without a touch of fear, when I remember how the Belgians treated the French at the time of the infamous Dumouriez's retreat. We should do well, I think, to treat them as enemies, while showing them the consideration which they have reason to expect from our generosity; but to wait till we are really sure of their true sentiments before we treat them as brothers. However, any observations of which Régis Deshorties is capable can surely not have escaped the piercing eye of the Committee. Its activity and foresight make themselves felt in all parts of the Republic. Kiss Charlotte Robespierre and her friends for me, and accept the

affectionate greetings of your devoted townsman and heartfelt friend.

F.-R. DESHORTIES."

We can see from this document that Charlotte Robespierre had not made known in Arras the quarrel which had separated her from her brothers, with whom she no longer lived.<sup>1</sup> Charlotte does not answer Régis' letters asking her for news of Augustin. Régis is astonished at this silence, of which he does not know the cause.

Who was this Isabelle Canone, to whom Régis Deshorties was giving proofs of devotion which she did not seem to appreciate? Let us hope that some learned scholar at Arras will inform us one day.

The worthy Buissart, the prophet of the Revolution, as Régis calls him, who was so tenderly submissive to his wife, is well known to historians. He was one of Maximilien's dearest friends.<sup>2</sup>

As for the septuagenarian "doctor of Montpellier," of whom Régis gives him news, this refers to Gabriel Durut, who, like Deshorties senior, had married one of Robespierre's aunts on the father's side, Aldegonde-Henriette. He lived at Arras, and was proud of his doctor's degree of the University of Montpellier.

Uncle Carrault, whom Régis calls by the nickname of Shetonien, and of whom he is afraid, is Robespierre's uncle on the mother's side. He owned a brewery in the rue Ronville.

Régis Deshorties' letter is perhaps the last Augustin Robespierre received from his friends at Arras. Ten days after it was written he ascended the scaffold.

<sup>1</sup> As to this quarrel see the interesting study by Hector Fleischmann, *Robespierre et Guffroy*, in the *Annales révolutionnaires*, t. III, 1910, pp. 321-40.

<sup>2</sup> Paris published, in his *Jeunesse de Robespierre*, the letters which Maximilien wrote him during the Constituent Assembly.

## CHAPTER III

### ROBESPIERRE AND AIGOIN <sup>1</sup>

IT was a misfortune for history that Robespierre's papers, which were placed under seal after Thermidor, fell into the hands of the deputy Courtois of Aube. This peculator, the friend of Danton, treated these papers as his personal property. He set aside those which he considered the most unfavourable to the memory of his enemy, and published them, sometimes in mutilated form, in the appendix to his famous report of Nivôse, Year III. Both originals and copies are still to be found to-day, in the National Archives, among the documents of the parliamentary commission of which Courtois drew up the report. As for the rest, which were doubtless the larger and more important portion of them, he disposed of them at his own sweet will, and most of them are now lost. So it is a piece of good fortune for a student to find a few remains which have escaped destruction.

The unpublished letters which we print below come from the Aigoïn papers at the National Archives.<sup>2</sup> They are not originals, but copies certified accurate, and bearing the signature of the three clerks of the Committee of General Security, Sauvage, Valant, and Dubois, who drew them up in accordance with the originals. These clerks worked under the orders of the parliamentary commission charged with the examination of

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires* of January–February 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup> 4577.

Robespierre's papers, as is proved by the manuscript references at the head of their copies. Thus the authenticity of the documents leaves nothing to be desired.

Robespierre's correspondent, François-Victor Aigoin, was not a mere nobody. He was a partner in the banking house of Lajard, Brunet and Co., and one of the chief merchants in Montpellier. When the municipality was re-elected on December 11, 1791, he was elected as one of the twenty-one notables of the commune. Aigoin was an admirer of Robespierre, for he had asked him to stand godfather to his son. But at the time at which we must place his first letter, he had not yet learnt to distinguish between the different groups of Jacobins, and Robespierre's polemics against Brissot, and even against Lafayette, amazed and disturbed him. The objections which he puts forward are interesting.

MONTPELLIER, *June 17, 1792,*  
*Year IV of Liberty.*

"The letter, my dear patriot, has safely reached me, in which you kindly consent to adopt my son.<sup>1</sup> This precious letter, which I would rather have than all the treasures in the universe, was worth a thousand kisses to Guillaume-August Maximilien Robespierre Aigoin, who sends them to you, and has brought soft tears of love and gratitude to the eyes of his father and, above all, of his good mamma. I cannot describe what an effect your touching mark of affection has produced upon her, for it is impossible to express what one feels so keenly, and you know that women have a great advantage over us in this respect.

<sup>1</sup> Deschamps, the wholesale haberdasher, resident in Paris, had already asked Robespierre to accept the sponsorship of his child (Ernest Hamel, *Histoire de Robespierre*, t. II, p. 105).



The third number of your interesting journal<sup>1</sup> has reached me, and I greatly appreciate your kind thought; but, my friend, you have some who co-operate with you, or at any rate you are not the only person interested in this laudable enterprise. Can it be just to let you do harm to others in order to oblige me? I beg you, therefore, to number me among your subscribers, and to add to your kindness by sending word to Duplaind<sup>2</sup> to draw thirty-six livres on Rilliet and Co., the Paris bankers, who will pay them over to him in accordance with the instructions which they have from Lajard, Brunet and Co., of Montpellier, in which house I am a partner. I should also like this bookseller to send me the first two numbers, as I have not got them; and will he address them to me as F.-V. Aigoin, not Aigoin Aigoin, as he addressed No. 3; but enough of this matter. Let us discuss what all Frenchmen ought to be thinking about in these serious times, namely, the public weal.

I cannot speak to you about this great subject without talking about yourself, just as it is impossible to talk about a battle without mentioning the generals of the army, or a famous fight without mentioning the athletes.

This being granted, I will say to you: how does it happen that patriots are divided among themselves in the hour of battle? I feel that you will answer that the Condorcets, Brissots, Guadets, Vergniauds, and Gensonnés are anything but patriots. 'See my third number,' you will add. I admit that in it you bring some serious charges! Your references to Avignon and the

<sup>1</sup> *Le Défenseur de la Constitution*, the first number of which appeared on Thursday, May 17. No. 3 must have appeared on Thursday, May 31. See *Annales révol.*: 1911, t. IV, p. 671.

<sup>2</sup> Duplain the printer, who lived in the Cour de Commerce, quite near Danton.

worthy Marseillais, in particular, are unanswerable,<sup>1</sup> for it is terrible to see those very men sacrificed who saved the southern departments from the horrors of civil war, and perhaps all France from a general upheaval; however, you are forced to applaud their conduct in many circumstances, and if, where you see crimes, there were nothing but mistakes, is it not unspeakably painful to see patriots cruelly disunited on account of mutual mistakes? As for the ministers, is it our place to find out whether they are those belonging to this or that cabal?<sup>2</sup> No. We ought to confine ourselves to seeing whether they love the Constitution, whether they make it work, whether they defend it, until we are enabled to revise it, and thus restore it to its original purity and conformity with the Declaration of the Rights of Man, by removing the flaws by which it was degraded and obscured during the latter days of the Constituent Assembly. It is to this that we must confine ourselves, and this in itself is a very big task. Did the English amuse themselves with enquiring whether the famous Schafftsbury (*sic*) was the minister of a cabal? No, but they profited by his enlightenment and availed themselves of his genius, and from that time onwards the least enlightened minds foretold the approaching fall of the royal prerogative; besides, my good friend, what is to become of us if the Condorcets, the Guadets, the Brissots, the Gensonnés, the Vergniauds are

<sup>1</sup> "You have abandoned the cause of Avignon's liberty," said Robespierre to the Girondins. "You have deserted the Marseillais, the saviours of the South, the steadiest support of the Revolution. . . ." (see Robespierre's article in Buchet and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, t. XIV, pp. 397-416).

<sup>2</sup> Robespierre reproached the Girondins with having supported Narbonne, the Minister for War, who was suspect to patriots, and filling up posts with their creatures.

not patriots, if they are enemies of the country? What is left but to start a civil war, or bury ourselves in the tomb of slavery? For indeed the party which you call the patriotic party, that of the deputies who leave nothing to desire as regards enlightenment, and above all as regards their unyielding probity; this party, I say, is infinitesimally small. The court party, that of the Jaucourts, Dumas, Calvets, Laureaus, Chérons, etc., etc., is infinitely more numerous. It must be, and always will be, thanks to the equally corrupting and poisoned waters of the civil list; but at any rate, if we are so unfortunate as this, and if you suppose that the men I have mentioned are capable of joining forces with these monsters, as I have already said, there is an end of our liberty; and note that by loss of liberty I mean the slightest act which might add to the royal prerogative, which might tend to break up the unity of the legislative body, etc.; and yet who is it that has rendered harmless for this purpose the ill-will of the corrupt members of the legislative body? It was Guadet who took from the king his usurped prerogative of appointing to the higher posts in the department of national finance. It was Condorcet who contributed most largely towards the vetoed decree against the non-juring priests. It was Gensonné who destroyed a conspiracy which was about to break out in every part of the empire. It was Brissot who, by overthrowing Lessart, unmasked the plots of the satellites of the executive power. It was Vergniaud who helped, by his speeches and writings, to propagate philosophic principles, and the eternal enlightenment of reason, and to cause their triumph over the errors of royal and religious fanaticism and the bloody onslaughts of superstition. It was all of them together.

Having these great advantages, if they conspire to bring about the loss of public liberty, if they join its declared enemies, all is up with it, I repeat once more, or else we must draw the sword, cast away the sheath, and drive the unworthy legislators from the seat of national government. Ah! What a monstrous prospect it will be, if it is proved that all the constitutional representatives of the nation, or at least the great majority of them, are both treacherous and perjured! Do you not see, then, my dear Robespierre, whither this terrible system is dragging you? Examine once more the spontaneous impulses of your patriotic heart and impressionable soul, and mistrust them. If these men are criminals, stone them and have no pity, for pity would be a crime; but if, among the things for which you blame them, they have only made mistakes, draw near to them, and invite them to union and concord. These alone will save us amid our dangers, when we all arise in defence of liberty. Ought we to trouble about a petty trial, when the whole of Europe is threatening the political life of France? We must admit that this would be both dangerous and senseless, and the country expects too much of you, and of virtuous citizens like you, not to require the greatest sacrifices of you, and, in the first place, that of your wounded self-esteem or mistaken impulses.

I pass to another matter which is no less essential. Lafayette is at the head of one of the armies of liberty, and this army shelters many generals or other officers who, having failed to disband all the troops of the line, so as to reorganize them and immediately afterwards give them officers chosen by the men,<sup>1</sup> will take advantage of the first favourable moment to betray

<sup>1</sup> As Robespierre had proposed during the Constituent Assembly.



their oath and their country, and go over to the enemy. We have all the more reason to fear this, as such events have often occurred, and are happening every day. But you go much further than this ; and I will say here, Robespierre, that an ordinary man may let loose an erroneous or dangerous opinion upon society, without serious consequences, but the same is not the case of a man who has for three years resisted all temptations, every kind of corruption and illusions, and whose virtue, like that of Cato, might have triumphed over the very gods. Robespierre, you are that man ; and yet you proclaim from the tribune, you publish in your writings, that Lafayette is a traitor.<sup>1</sup> I will first ask you whether you are certain of this fact, and secondly, whether you have measured the full danger of such an opinion, which is spreading, and bound to spread, since it is you who are preaching it. Now I will begin by discussing the former proposition ; for if I prove that all Frenchmen, including yourself, ought to esteem Lafayette, because of his past life, because he devoted his earliest youth to the defence of liberty, because in the first great days of the assembly he dictated a declaration of rights perhaps more comprehensive, especially with regard to religious opinions, than the one adopted, because our royal enemies fear and hate him, and above all, the *émigrés* detest him : such are the claims upon which is based the esteem of Frenchmen for Lafayette, and their confidence in him. You think differently, and must indeed do so, since you proclaim this abroad. But let us consider whether some

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre had denounced Lafayette at the Jacobin Club on April 18, 1792, and demanded his dismissal on the 23rd of the same month. On the intrigues of Lafayette and the generals at the beginning of the war of 1792 see our article in the *Annales révolutionnaires* of March-April, 1922.

prejudice may not have led you into error about him, and dictated your opinion.

The Constituent Assembly did not finish as it had begun. All enlightened men are aware of the evils of the revision, and how the king's flight, which was naturally bound to limit his prerogative and widen the bounds of public liberty, almost stifled this liberty in its cradle ; but not enough consideration has been given, in my opinion, to the innumerable difficulties with which the Constituent Assembly found itself surrounded at that fatal period. Reason, principle, perhaps even public policy required that Louis XVI should be punished, and consequently dethroned. There could be no palliation of his flight and dissimulation ; his treason was obvious. It seemed then, as if the occasion had arisen, if not to dispense with such a king, at any rate to limit his prerogatives, to abolish heredity, inviolability, and what was excessive, and consequently dangerous to liberty, in the civil list, besides the power of patronage in an infinite number of posts, which gave him too much influence, and in consequence too many means of corruption, etc., etc. This was your opinion and Pétion's, and that of several sincerely virtuous members of your assembly. I have already said that it was dictated by reason, justice and principle, and I will add that it was that of all enlightened Frenchmen, who know that despots are incorrigible ; but when the Constituent Assembly descended from the high position to which its wonderful energy had raised it, at the time of the king's flight, and reviewed in cold blood the danger it had run, and the precipice which it had at its feet ; when it saw all Europe in arms against France, and itself without disciplined troops and leaders, it shuddered at the dangers

to which the common weal would be exposed, whether the king were dethroned or fled again, or refused to accept the Constitution, and it was this fear, make no mistake, which inspired the decrees against the People's Societies, massacred peaceable, unarmed citizens on the Champ de Mars, and degraded this same Constitution. I have no doubt whatever that the chief members of the seven committees were seduced by the civil list. I have no more confidence than you have in the virtue of the Barnaves, Lameths, Duports, Dandrés, Beaumetz, etc., etc., but I believe, and so should you, that the for-ever-to-be-honoured majority of that august assembly remained incorruptible, and that if the speeches of these false creatures made more impression upon it than yours and Pétion's, if the efforts of this cabal prevailed in their minds over those of the noblest disinterestedness, the sublimest virtue, and the purest love of country, this was solely to be ascribed to the terror which it felt lest the king might refuse to accept the Constitution unless it was presented to him in an acceptable form.

The question now is how to place Lafayette : whether to class him with those who have been seduced or corrupted, or with the credulous and candid majority. If Lafayette thought that the common weal was in danger if the king were badly treated, he acted in accordance with his principles. If he tried to prevent the effects of a petition tending to demand the punishment of Louis XVI—I am far from bestowing even the most distant approbation upon the massacre of the Champ de Mars, but, really now, was not this terrible crime rather the work of the municipality than his, and can it be ascribed solely to him ? Since love of country justifies everything, if in his opinion he saw that the country was endangered by the persecution

of Louis XVI, would he have incurred the blame of the universe, would he not have been left with the sure refuge of his conscience and the knowledge of the good which he thought he was doing? Such—if you add a whole life devoted to the most important and noble functions, to those which make liberty most highly valued, if you add that he is idolized by the Parisians, now regenerated and liberated—such are Lafayette's claims to the confidence of Frenchmen, which cause them to believe that few could produce their equal.

I believe, like you, that public liberty can only perish by armed force, and even if you had not said it, the experience and history of all the centuries and all revolutions would have demonstrated it. But beside the fact that the character I have just given of Lafayette makes it very improbable that he should incur the guilt of such a crime, even if he intended and willed to do so; could he do it? So soon after the most astonishing revolution that ever took place, would the army of liberty be party to enslaving its fellow-countrymen? Could citizen fight against citizen, during the very era in which the satellites of the old despotism respected them? You must feel yourself how absurd it would be to think it; but I will go still further, and I tell you that, even admitting all your premisses—namely that Lafayette had the idea of destroying liberty, and the will and power to do it—it would be still less advisable than ever to say so, in print, too, and I do not require to tell you. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Several months elapsed between Aigoin's first letter to Robespierre and his second, during which important events took place. On August

<sup>1</sup> The clerk who copied this letter adds a note at the end of his copy: “*Note.* This letter, which is from Aigoin, is incomplete.”



to the throne fell beneath the blows of the Mountain. Lafayette justified Robespierre's distrust by trying to restore it, and training his army on Paris. As Aigoïn had predicted, the soldiers would not follow him, and Lafayette had to cross the frontier. The struggle broke out with fresh bitterness between the Girondins and the Mountain at the moment of the first invasion. The Girondins stigmatized their opponents as anarchists and destroyers of order. They blamed them for the September massacres; they stirred up the departments against Paris. Aigoïn, who was defending them against Robespierre in June, not only deserted them, but turned against them. He accused them of preparing for civil war by their project for forming a guard from the departments to defend the Convention against Paris. He was stirred by the aggressions of Barbaroux and Louvet against Robespierre. He now believed that Brissot's faction existed. He was whole-heartedly on the side of Robespierre and the Mountain, that is to say, with the party of national defence.

"This time, my dear Robespierre, the dictatorship is no figment of the imagination; I do not know who is exercising it, but the motive force exists, as you will see.

The southern departments are called upon by the general councils to furnish three men from each company of the National Guard, to go to Paris and protect the Convention.<sup>1</sup> So that you may be in no doubt, I enclose the letter of summons addressed to me.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The project for a departmental guard had not yet been voted by the Convention, and never was.

<sup>2</sup> It was doubtless in his capacity as a National Guard that Aigoïn had been summoned. He had not been re-elected Deputy at the elections of November 1792. His partner Brunet had just entered the directory of the department. (Duval-Jouve, *Montpellier pendant la Révolution*, t. II, p. 17.)

Can it be their fatal plan to destroy Liberty by civil war? Who are the instigators of this terrible event? That is what I do not know; but what is of infinite importance is to go back to the cause of all these troubles; what is important, is to punish the traitors who dare to make use of the public forces against a generous nation which has committed no other crime than that of having won and re-won Liberty, in spite of its cowardly mandataries,<sup>1</sup> and which will manage to preserve it in its entirety, even if these mandataries were to die of vexation. You will make whatever use you may think fit of this denunciation, which is too important to be passed over in silence, and even of my name, as a certificate and guarantee of its genuineness.

To-day's post has brought us the scandalous details of the accusation brought against you. On this subject I refer you to what I said in my last.<sup>2</sup> Time is a great teacher, and the time is no doubt not far distant when schemers of all classes, and the people's tyrants, under whatever form they may disguise themselves, will be unmasked, and reduced to the most utter insignificance. But what is really scandalous is that, within those very walls where they dared to absolve Lafayette, the defence of an accused man is interrupted by murmurings<sup>3</sup>; for within those walls, over which justice and truth ought to hover, there are some representatives of the nation who think themselves more than men, but are not even so much as men; who do not

<sup>1</sup> These cowardly mandataries were obviously the Girondins, in whose sincerity Aigoin does not believe.

<sup>2</sup> Louvet's speech against Robespierre was delivered on October 29, 1792. The letter which Aigoin refers to is missing from the papers.

<sup>3</sup> Robespierre had been violently interrupted and taken to task by the Girondins, supported by Guadet, who was presiding.

know how—who are unable to preserve that calm and imposing attitude alone suitable to citizens—who desire to condemn or absolve at the right time.

I shall await with great impatience the result of Monday's session,<sup>1</sup> to which your speech of defence has been adjourned; I have no doubt it will be clear and decisive, and it will become still more so when our political horizon, and this web of intrigue in which we are involved, have been a little cleared up.

Louvet upbraided the Jacobins severely for not applauding the Jacobin ministers appointed during the Legislative Assembly. But the good man did not see that these same Jacobins were not so insane as not to draw an enormous distinction between the virtuous Roland and the treacherous Lessart<sup>2</sup>; they merely complained, with much justice and reason, that those good ministers, virtuous as they were, were appointed by a faction in the Legislative Assembly, that of Brissot. They were right in principle, for tyranny is very near at hand when the power of executing the laws is added to that of making them, since the ministers are in effect ministers from the moment they are nominated. They had reason to fear—those Jacobins whom people are trying to decry now—that an opposing faction in the bosom of that same assembly might drive out these same good ministers, and replace them by the most infamous citizens; and those Jacobins are the less to be blamed for holding such an opinion, since it will not be long before all their fears are realized.

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre replied to Louvet on November 5, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> De Lessart, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the eve of the war, had been impeached before the High Court on March 10, 1792, on the motion of Brissot, on a charge of complicity with Austria.

I have received your last letter, with the first two numbers of your *Letter to your Constituents*.<sup>1</sup> Duplain had sent me No. 2, no doubt by your orders. Kindly ask him to send me the following numbers regularly. If he fails me I shall complain to you, and your friendship will supply the deficiency.

Your fears about the post are not fanciful. I have no doubt that the enemies of the country have access to its secrets ; I can at least assure you that the whole of the correspondence of the Jacobins with our Society is intercepted ; and we are going to take the most salutary measures in this respect.

I repeat that I wait for your news with all the impatience of friendship. What there is in the public press will only half satisfy me about your struggle on Monday. May it for ever destroy intrigue and intriguers, and at last open the eyes of those of your colleagues who have been seduced in spite of the purity of their intentions.

Robespierre, Aigoin embraces you.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN."

Montpellier, November 7, 1st Year of the Republic (1792). True copy: Sauvage.

MONTPELLIER, November 20, 1792,  
*Year I of the French Republic.*

"My last letter, dearest Robespierre, enclosed the notice of summons to my battalion, for the purpose of contributing towards the formation of the Guard of the National Convention ; and I informed you how illegal such a step appeared to me before a decree of the Convention had determined the form and contingents of this guard. I have since heard that that fellow Pa-

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre's first *Letter to his Constituents* (*Lettre à ses Commettants*) appeared after September 25, 1792.



ganel, the deputy for the department of Lot-et-Garonne, had written to his department to hurry on the departure of the citizens who were devoting themselves to piercing the breasts of the generous revolutionaries of August 10. The Society of Agen drew up an address on the subject and sent it out to all the patriotic societies of the Republic, which is certainly calculated to foment a civil war or annihilate victory. You will form your own opinion. And these wretches have pretended to be afraid of a dictatorship? Do not they exercise one themselves? Is not Paganel a dictator? In the first place, he is the legislative power, since before it has had its deliberations, he sets the soldiers in motion; and for the same reason he is the executive power; he is the judicial power, since it will not be his fault if the worthy Parisians do not fall a victim to the blows of their brothers in the departments; and he seems to condemn them to this. I am sending you this most curious document, which in your hands may be extremely useful to the common weal.

We have had our son dangerously ill, and at the point of death for two days, but he has rallied and come victoriously forth from the arms of death, just as you have done from the treacherous accusation of your perfidious enemies.

I embrace you with all my heart.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN."

"You would never imagine the extent to which public opinion has begun to be vitiated. Indeed, it will soon be worse than in the palmy days of the Feuillants. The Jacobins, the true and sincere friends of Equality and a popular Constitution, ought to redouble their prudence, efforts and energy; I might even say adroitness. Every-

thing is allowable in order that virtue may triumph over vice, that the slave may put an end to tyranny. Look at the ingenious arrangement by which the *Chronique* supports the *Patriote*, the *Patriote* supports Gorsas, Gorsas the *Sentinelle*, the *Sentinelle* the *Gazette nationale de la France*; it is as if you were to say: Millin supports Brissot, Brissot Gorsas, Gorsas Louvet, Louvet Garat, the whole collection of them supports the virtuous ministers *per fas et nefas*, and the virtuous ones, for their part, likewise *per fas et nefas*, support our illustrious friends, and cover the whole Republic with a cloud of libels.<sup>1</sup> I know that the Jacobins have considered several newspapers, and have entrusted their management to pure and skilful hands<sup>2</sup>; but note that they have chosen the wrong form. What the people want are not pamphlets, now that their curiosity is more and more insatiable every day; but daily papers, full of telling passages, with an accurately abridged account of the debates in the Convention. This is the method that must be adopted, advertising the enterprise by plenty of prospectuses. I was intending to write to your Society on this subject. May I ask you to act as my interpreter in this matter, which I consider of supreme importance."

True copy: Sauvage, Chief Secretary.

"You, whose whole life has been devoted to the defence of oppressed or persecuted innocence, will be pleased to see, dearest Robespierre, that I am supplying you with a fresh opportunity of

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre attacked the Girondin press in his 6th *Lettre à ses Commettants*, which he wrote after receiving this letter from Aigoin (see Buchez and Roux, t. XXI, pp. 38-43).

<sup>2</sup> At the session of October 31 a member of the correspondence committee of the Jacobins had proposed to the Club the foundation of a weekly paper.

fulfilling such a congenial duty. It is worthy of your pure soul and much-abused virtue not to allow yourself to be daunted by the myriad thorns sown in your path by schemers ; it is worthy of you, at a moment when your daring enemies are seeking popularity by flattering the man in power, and heaping injuries on oppressed innocence, to raise the latter from the night of the tomb to which they desire to drag him. I will not enter into details about the matter to which I am drawing your attention. J.-A. Chaptal, who will give you my letter, will relate it to you at length, and hand you the memoranda intended to enlighten all impartial men ; how you will grieve when you are informed of the perfidy with which they tried to ruin poor Lajard, by identifying his alleged misdeed with those of which a minister of the same name may have been guilty. You will shudder, I say ! I will not dilate further upon the matter, for fear of being too long-winded ; I will say but one word : I swear that Lajard is innocent.

I do not recommend Chaptal to you ; there is no need. You will be charmed to make his acquaintance, and you will find in him a man of letters and learning, and above all, an excellent patriot.<sup>1</sup> Farewell, dear Robespierre, I embrace you from the depths of a heart which is all yours.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN."

Montpellier, December 1, Year I of the Republic. True Copy : Sauvage, Principal Secretary.

<sup>1</sup> Chaptal was the head of a great factory of chemical products at Montpellier. His relations with Robespierre must have drawn attention to him, for in the Year II he was entrusted with important contracts for munitions of war. See my essay on the " Mobilization of learned men in the Year II " in the *Revue de Paris* of December 1, 1917.

MONTPELLIER, 2 March, 1793,  
*Year II of the French Republic.*

“What a terrible situation is ours, my dear Robespierre ! Can it be true that we have caught a glimpse of liberty and equality, only to be plunged a moment afterwards into all the horrors, either of the most savage anarchy, or of a tyranny worse than anarchy itself ? What a heartrending spectacle France affords, that fair land newly won for liberty and equality, which ought also to have been won for the greatest and finest virtues.

A handful of schemers is squabbling over the spoils of our former despots, the generals are betraying us, the patriots are divided among themselves and rending each other in pieces, and appear henceforth to offer an easy prey to the first monster who wishes to enslave them ; ah, what may we not fear if such a state of things lasts, if the most active and, above all, the purest patriots are everywhere contemned, disarmed and persecuted !

Alas, when in your speech of the 9th of this month<sup>1</sup> you spoke of the patriots disarmed at Montpellier,<sup>2</sup> you were doubtless unaware that it was your friend at whom the blows of the aristocrats, or the misguided, were aimed with increasing fury ; you will see by the papers which I am sending you to what a pitch, in this odious persecution, they have carried their forgetfulness of the laws governing the most sacred rights of the man and the citizen, their Feuillantism and their doubly misguided party spirit.

<sup>1</sup> In this speech, in which he commented upon the causes of the disaster at Aix-la-Chapelle, Robespierre had sharply criticized the internal and external policy of the Executive Council.

<sup>2</sup> “The aristocracy is raising its insolent head,” Robespierre had said, “and at Montpellier patriots are oppressed and disarmed by the despotic orders of an oppressive Directory.”



You will also see, and, I hope, with a most pleasing satisfaction, with what vigour I have managed to resist unjust oppression. I am sending all the details and papers about my affair to the Jacobins, and to several patriotic deputies in the Convention. My cause is theirs, and I do not doubt that they will put forth all their strength to cause it to triumph, since it is that of justice and liberty, for which they have always fought.

I beg you, dear brother and friend, to follow up this matter with all that vigour which you have always succeeded in displaying in the cause of oppressed patriots; and this vigour will no doubt increase in proportion as my cause is more just and my affection for you more tender.

I asked you for your works; everything, down to your slightest opinions, down to your dreams, if that were possible, is of inestimable worth to me. You have not complied with my request, my excellent friend. Your many occupations have no doubt been the reason, but you will doubtless have more consideration for me now that I am unfortunate; let me read you, let me philosophize a little with you—you whom I call, with so much truth and pleasure, the true friend of man; and I shall feel that all my ills are alleviated.

I beg you, dear Robespierre, to remember your poor, but very devoted friend, and to hand the enclosed packet to the Jacobin Society, which will doubtless decide to appoint a commission to look into my affair. Kindly persuade them to do so. I will not tell you again that I love you, for how can I tell it you with as much truth and energy as that with which I preserve in my heart this tender and precious sentiment?

F.-V. AIGOIN.

Your son [godson] is charming, another consolation which the injustice of men cannot tear from me."

True copy, this 4th Frimaire of the Year III  
of the Republic one and indivisible : Courtois,  
Deputy for Aube.

The pamphlets which Aigoïn mentions that he was sending to Robespierre are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale.<sup>1</sup> They enable us to find out what precisely were the persecutions of which he was the object on the part of the Girondin authorities of Montpellier. Aigoïn had been disarmed as a suspect, and struck off the roll of the National Guard. He complained in particular of the mayor, M. Durand, and the municipal officer Briegne, whom he calls "the Dietrich of Montpellier." On February 23 he protested against the decision of the disciplinary council which had disarmed him, by a placard in which he challenged his enemies to produce any facts in support of the charge that he was an "agitator, an enemy of order, an anarchist." On May 12 he posted up a fresh notice on which he reproduced a certificate of civism which had just been granted him by the *juges de paix* Clément of the *arrondissement* of Les Carmes, and Rainaud, of the *arrondissement* of Lattes: Clément and Rainaud certified that they had received no denunciations of Aigoïn. The latter referred the affair to the

<sup>1</sup> F. V. Aigoïn, *citoyen de Montpellier, à ses concitoyens*, 4to broadsheet; *Bibl. nat. Ln.* 27. 159. F. V. Aigoïn, *citoyen de Montpellier, à tous les corps administratifs et à toutes les sociétés populaires de la République* (to all the administrative bodies and People's Societies of the Republic), 8vo, 8 p. *Id. Lb.* 41. 2872. Covering letter to the representatives of the people, no title, sheet of 8vo paper dated April 5, 1793. The one preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale has on the cover this note: A. Thibodeau (*sic*) member of the Convention at Paris, *Lb.* 41. 2879.

Convention. He sent petitions to the deputies of the Mountain. He tried to interest the People's Societies in his cause, and particularly the Jacobins in Paris. We have just seen that he counted chiefly upon his friend Robespierre. Having received no answer to his letter of March 22, he wrote again on April 8 :

MONTPELLIER, *April 8,*  
*Year II of the Republic.*

“Pursued, my dear Robespierre, with inconceivable animosity by the enemies of the public weal, I do not know whether the important memorials which I sent off to you on the 22nd of last month may not have been stolen, together with a similar packet which I begged you to hand to the Society sitting at the Jacobins. I enclose a fresh publication in which I rebut a fresh outrage; I implore you kindly to acknowledge receipt of them by return of post. Enlighten and strengthen me in the struggle which I am forced to wage with the enemies or misguided friends of the country, and may the good cause triumph in the end.

You have doubtless stopped your *Letters to your Constituents*, since I have only received up to No. 8.<sup>1</sup> If you have continued them, in this form or any other, have them sent to me, and above all oblige me by sending me your speech at the Jacobins on March 29.

If I do not receive one of your letters very promptly, I confess that I shall be in great suspense as to the safety of my correspondence with you and the patriotic deputies. Our poor country ! Our poor country ! How they are trying to rend you !

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN.

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre published 10 *Lettres à ses Commettants*.

There is an infamous rumour in circulation here, to the detriment of Citizens Bazier, Rovère, and Legendre, commissaries at Lyons, invented by Ciprien Delon,<sup>1</sup> which the enemies of the country affect to applaud."

True copy : Valant, Correspondence Clerk.

"I am much astonished, my dear Robespierre, at receiving no answer either from you or the Jacobin Society to my letter of March 23 last, in which I begged you all to support the important petition which I was laying before the National Convention, and of which I informed you.

I do not know whether I ought to blame the untrustworthiness of the postal administration, or whether your important occupations, during the critical moments through which we have just passed, have prevented you from taking an interest in my business ; but I know quite well that, though I have written about the matter to a great number of patriotic deputies, not one of them, except Dumont, the sans-culotte deputy for the department of Somme, where good deputies are rare, has shown the least sign of life.

However, I have good news to tell you ; the treason of Dumouriez and his like will be worth more to the Republic than the most brilliant victory ; every day brings us from Paris a hundred pairs of spectacles for our good people, but lately blinded by the manœuvres of Roland, Louvet, Brissot and Gorsac ; public spirit is reviving, and enthusiasm for liberty is gaining all hearts, and, where they hoped to find our ruin, our enemies will find their own confusion.

And even apart from what particularly con-

<sup>1</sup> Is this the brother of Jacques Delon, deputy for Gard in the Legislative Assembly ?



cerns them, men's minds have entirely come round, and I am on the eve of obtaining the most brilliant reparation from the Club, the National Guard and the administrative bodies.

But, my dear Robespierre, I am none the less ardently desirous of the success of the petition which I have laid before the National Convention and the Provisional Executive Council, because I have always looked upon this affair far less from the point of view of my personal interest and private injury than from that of the high interest and safety of the republic, which would have run the greatest risks, threatened as it is by a military government, if the armed forces continued to usurp the judicial power and arbitrarily to condemn citizens.

I beg you then, dearest friend, to take immediate steps to lay my petition before the National Convention. I enclose you a duplicate, in case the first packet has been spirited away; and with regard to the documents upon which I base my just demands, the patriot Dumont is charged to communicate them to you and to the Jacobin Society.

I implore you to acknowledge the receipt of all I have sent you. The decree suppressing the newspapers may have suspended the despatch of your *Letters to your Constituents*, but as this decree has been revoked, and you have doubtless resumed them, I beg you to have Nicolas told to send me the rest, for I stopped at No. 8.

I asked you for your patriotic works written during the first Constituent Assembly. When will you send me them? Are you less fond of me? I cannot believe it; for I am not fortunate.

My friend, write me only a word; but I want one, and if I do not get this word, I swear that you shall not have news of my Robespierre.

But you will make your peace, and I embrace you with all my heart.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN."

Montpellier, April 16, Year II of the Republic.

It so happens that we have the answer written by Robespierre to this letter of Aigoin's.

"MY DEAR AIGOIN,

Since I stopped writing to you I have been both unwell and extremely busy. I did not receive your first letter. As a result of the second, I have done everything in my power to obtain for you the justice due to your pure and unshakable civism; and all good citizens have granted it to you. Mind, my dear friend, that you never doubt my tender friendship. After our country, I love nothing so much as men like you. You share the annoyances which you are experiencing with all true friends of the republic and of virtue. Be brave, and let your civism itself console you for the persecutions which it has brought upon you. Rely upon my devoted affection, but have a little indulgence for the state of lassitude and exhaustion to which my trying occupations sometimes reduce me.

Farewell. Embrace all our dear ones for me.

ROBESPIERRE."<sup>1</sup>

Paris, May 2, Year II of the Republic.

Robespierre's letter took a long time to reach Montpellier. It had not yet arrived at its destination when, on May 22, Aigoin once more took up the pen to complain to Robespierre of his long silence. .

<sup>1</sup> The rough draft of this letter is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, *fonds français, nouvelles acquisitions*, 312, fol. 139. We published it in *Annales révolutionnaires*, 1913, t. VI, p. 564.

MONTPELLIER, *May 22, 1793,*  
*Year II of the French Republic.*

“Is it possible, dearest Robespierre, that you can go for so long without giving me a single sign of life? You have already several letters of mine to answer. And indeed, I have for long past excused you from doing so, since all your time belongs to the common weal, which certainly has great need that your watchful eye should be incessantly upon it, so that it shall suffer no harm; but I provided you with an opportunity to concern yourself with the public weal by concerning yourself with your friend, and laying before the Convention the petition which I sent you a long time ago to protest against a violation of the sacred rights of the man and citizen which has been practised on me in the most abominable and unprecedented manner. We should have seen, or rather we shall see (for I indeed hope that you will be so good as to act in this matter, as I asked you, in concert with the patriot André Dumont), we shall see, I say, on this occasion, whether the Right will defend the rights of man with the same vigour that it displayed in the affair of M. Peyre, whom it desired to screen from revolutionary justice.

You have made several speeches, either from the tribune of the Convention or at the Jacobins, which have aroused universal admiration; but you have not sent me them. I also asked you for the record of your opinions in the Constituent Assembly, which would be of such value to my son and yours; but you have not sent it me. I have only received up to No. 10 of your journal, and I do not know whether any more has appeared; what I do know is that, if it has not, it was at any rate not for lack of material.

‘Your friendship,’ you will perhaps say, ‘is

a desperately heavy burden.' Yes, indeed it is, and would to God, my friend, that yours were more so ; with what pleasure would I offer you my life to the last gasp, for it is all yours. Be so kind, my good friend, as to hand the enclosed packet to the Correspondence Committee of the Jacobins as promptly as you can. You would also oblige me if you would have the reports of the Convention sent to me, which you can do quite easily by giving the order to one of the clerks of the correspondence bureau.

You are no doubt by now acquainted with the Chabot affair. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Upon my word, it is such a rigmarole that one cannot make it out, but this much is certain, that our quite insignificant department has taken it as a tragedy. Moreover, the patriotic measures which have been so much and so justly vaunted, are not the business of the departmental administration, which has made such a fuss over adopting them in part, but of seven sans-culottes ; just like the enactment about tillage as carried out by the municipalities in my absence and that of the volunteers.<sup>2</sup> For thus the jay will trick itself out in peacock's plumes. Bonnier and Vouland, who are with you by now, will give you valuable details on the subject.

I embrace you, my friend, from the bottom of my heart.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN."

True copy : Dubois, Correspondence Clerk.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to an ordinance of the departmental administration of Hérault, dated April 19, on the methods of recruiting soldiers. They were no longer to be chosen by the vote or by lot, but by a committee appointed by the Commissaries of the Convention at the instance of the local authorities. The Convention approved this order on May 13, on the motion of Barère, and held it up as an example.

<sup>2</sup> This measure, which was enacted in Hérault on the initiative of Aigoin, was afterwards given a general application by legislation.



From MONTPELLIER, May 31, 1792.

“Nothing, my dear Robespierre, can equal the pleasure which your letters give me, and you cannot imagine how pleased I was with the last one I received from you ; it is all the dearer to me because I begged you, of my own accord, not to write to me often, so as not to interrupt your important work in the cause of public safety, which is very necessary at a time when so many ostensibly honest people are conspiring in their different ways to bring about its ruin.

Gossuin, President of the Correspondence Committee, has just informed me that my petition, with the documents accompanying it, was referred by a decree of April 6 last to the Committee of General Security. I beg you, therefore, my dear Robespierre, to persuade one of the patriotic members of the latter Committee to report on my business without delay, and if the papers should by chance have gone astray, kindly replace them by those which you, or André Dumont of Somme, have in your possession.

I have received no more of your *Letters to your Constituents* since No. 10 ; can you have discontinued them, or can it be a lapse of the post ?

I asked you to send me your last speeches in the Convention and at the Jacobins, and your works during the early days of the Constituent Assembly. Please do so, my friend ; my greatest happiness is to read your speeches and writings, and one is so rarely happy.

Pray have the enclosed packet sent to the Jacobins.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN.”

True copy : Dubois, Correspondence Clerk.

On the very day when Aigoin wrote this letter the Parisian sections were marching on the Con-

vention, to force it to expel the Girondin leaders. In this crisis of federalism Robespierre's friend was not false to his past. He protested against the call to arms which the Girondin administrations of Hérault had sent out at the beginning of June, and drew up, on his side, an appeal *To the Citizens of Calvados* to enjoin on them obedience to the Convention.<sup>1</sup> Duval-Jouve says that this appeal was very well written, and contains some most judicious comments on the party which was in revolt against the Convention, and on the means used to stir it up.

When the federalists had been conquered, Aigoin, who had helped to bear the brunt of the fight, was marked out for notice from the victorious party. He became president of the reorganized Jacobins of Montpellier, and began to preach its gospel in the neighbouring regions, and particularly at Toulouse. During a propaganda campaign which had taken him to that city he once more wrote to Robespierre:

TOULOUSE, October 2, 1793,  
*Year II of the Republic.*

“ I have had the good fortune, my dearest Robespierre, to bring forward, at the People's Society of Toulouse, a proposition which this society has resolved in debate to submit to the National Convention, asking it to pass a decree to the same effect. You will make yourself acquainted with these propositions, and you will agree that no better measures could be devised for the salvation of the country, which, unless you look to the matter, is on the eve of being annihilated by the ever-recurring plots of speculators. The General Council of the department of Haute-Garonne, animated, as always, by the most lively

<sup>1</sup> Duval-Jouve, *Montpellier pendant la Révolution*, t. II, p. 72.

and sincere patriotism, and seconded by the representatives of the people in these regions, has been forward in passing an ordinance with regard to this matter, which will be communicated to you by Citizen Bellecourt, one of its members, who is sent as its delegate to the National Convention, and Citizen Barousse, President of the Jacobin Society of Toulouse and likewise its delegate to the Convention. I entreat you, then, dearest friend, to do these deputies any services which lie within your power, and especially the bearer, Citizen Barousse; to introduce them to the Jacobin Society, and to support them by all those energetic qualities with which you are endowed, so as to aid them in obtaining the patriotic success which is their ambition.<sup>1</sup>

I embrace you with all my heart.

(Signed) F.-V. AIGOIN.

The good cause has at last triumphed at Montpellier. The Federalists, the followers of Roland and Brissot, are crushed and annihilated. I will only give you one proof of this, namely, that I am now president of the People's Society, from which I was recently banished in perpetuity for holding the doctrines of the Mountain."

True copy: Valant, Correspondence Clerk.

Robespierre had not forgotten his friend. Be-

<sup>1</sup> Barousse and Bellecourt, the latter a member of the departmental administration of Haute-Garonne, appeared at the bar of the Convention on October 17, 1793, and read out an ordinance making it compulsory upon all those in possession of coin to exchange it for assignats at the office of the district tax-collectors, under pain of denunciation to the public prosecutor, prosecution and condemnation, according to the prescribed forms of punishment for those guilty of counter-revolutionary crimes. But the Convention gave a bad reception to the ordinance, and annulled the ordinance issued by the department of Haute-Garonne on the forced exchange of currency. (*Archives parlementaires*, t. LXXVI, pp. 661-4.)

fore this last letter reached him, Aigoin, at the instance of the Committee of Public Safety, had been nominated by the Convention at its session of September 26, as a member of the jury of the Revolutionary Tribunal. There is nothing to prevent our believing that this choice had been suggested by Robespierre. Did Aigoin accept the position of trust to which he was called? This is doubtful, for I find that he was still at Montpellier at the time of the capture of Toulon. He was still President of the Jacobin Society, and offered the congratulations of patriots to the Convention in its name.<sup>1</sup> The representative Boisset had nominated him president of the district administrative body on October 22, but he did not stay long at this post, for he was replaced as early as the 29th Brumaire.<sup>2</sup>

On the 14th Nivôse in the Year II, Aigoin was appointed, on Barère's motion, National Commissary at the Treasury, in the place of Citizen Duvaisne.<sup>3</sup> There he was in a position more suited to his talents, for he was exercising the functions of a banker.

The correspondence of Aigoin with Robespierre was at an end. The two friends doubtless often met. They no longer had to write to each other. But Aigoin's family, left behind at Montpellier, did not hesitate to turn to Robespierre and ask little services of him. The following curious letter initiates us into their family affairs, even those of an intimate nature.

VIGAN, 7th Ventôse,

*Year two of the French Republic one and indivisible.*

"ESTEEMED CITIZEN,

My daughter-in-law wrote me from Montpellier on the 4th Nivôse, that in a few days' time

<sup>1</sup> Duval-Jouve, t. II, p. 98, note 3.

<sup>2</sup> Duval-Jouve, t. II, p. 118. <sup>3</sup> *Moniteur*, t. XIX, p. 130.



she was going to Paris with her two sons to rejoin her husband, who is my son ; not knowing where he resides in the great city, I have decided to take the liberty of directing my answer to this letter to you ; I have allowed myself this freedom with all the more reason since I am aware of, and more than touched by, the kindnesses which you have never ceased to show him, since the correspondence which he had with you, and his request that you would do him the honour of standing godfather to his younger son, and the affectionate and more than courteous answer in which you accepted the same, which overwhelmed me with the purest joy when I read it at the time. I am convinced that beneath your standard, and guided by the enlightened knowledge of one who is one of the most brilliant luminaries of the Convention, he will profit by your sublime lessons ; allow me to offer you my thanks, and exhort him always to be worthy of your esteem and continued friendship. I am, and always shall be, one of your most zealous admirers, and bearing in mind the fine things which I hear about you in the public papers, I am, with sincerest gratitude,

Your devoted,

(Signed) AIGOIN SENIOR."

"P.S. Allow me, Citizen Representative, as a true sans-culotte, the scribe of these two letters, and the brother of your friend Aigoïn, to avail myself of this opportunity, Citizen Representative, in order to request you to intercede for me with my above-mentioned brother. It is true that I was born out of wedlock, but I am none the less recognized as the first-born of the family, and admitted as such by my father. I have, however, suffered so many humiliations that it would be difficult for me to describe them ; but in spite of

all these trials, seeing our father aged eighty-six and deprived of his eyesight, I considered it my duty to go to him and take care of him. This is how I am at present occupied, in my filial capacity ; but since I have no fortune, and my father has no more than he requires, I should like to open a little book-shop of new works to help us to live : but as I have no funds, I wish that my brother would hand over to me a little trifle. He already knows that the law has reinstated me in my claims on my father's estate, so he would have nothing to fear. I will give him my receipt for it when I get it, and will pay as soon as I have disposed of my stock. I beg you, Citizen Representative, to obtain his consent to this ; in this case I should have to look at the catalogue of some book-seller, in order to make a selection of books of a sort useful and necessary to the public, such as classical books, plays and maps, all in the new fashion, so as to dispose of them as quickly as possible. Forgive me, Citizen Representative, for giving you all this trouble ; but the thought that it is a pleasure to you to do people services causes me to take this liberty.

Fraternal greetings,

ETIENNE AIGOIN."

True copy : Reborn, Correspondence Clerk to the Commission charged with examining the papers of the conspirators.

While Robespierre was spending his days and nights in the care of the highest interests of the nation, at a time of unprecedented crisis, he was receiving petitions of this sort. The profession of representative of the people is not a bed of roses.

The catastrophe of the 9th Thermidor arrived. Aigoïn was among those who did not desert the

Jacobins, and tried to struggle against the growth of reaction. At the session of the 5th Vendémiaire, Year III (September 26, 1794) he made a speech at the Club against the aristocrats who were raising their heads. "They are reviving Condorcet," he said, "and proclaiming him as the author of a Constitution which shall reconcile us to Kings. Jacobins reconciled to Kings! This is a reversal of all our ideas!" The new conspirators, like the Brissotins, travestied patriots as bloody men and September butchers. They were rallying round them the Royalists, the moderates and the indulgent. His speech made a great impression, and the Society ordered it to be printed.<sup>1</sup>

This success emboldened Aigoin. It was the time when Lecointre was attacking the terrorists who had overthrown Robespierre, and denouncing them as his accomplices. Did Aigoin conceive the plan of taking advantage of Lecointre's attack to hasten the fall of Collot, Barère, Billaud and their like, who had slain his friend? It is probable. He once more ascended the tribune of the Club on the 17th Vendémiaire, Year III (October 8, 1794). This time he claimed to prove the existence of a fresh conspiracy, "based on a system absolutely similar to that of Robespierre." He only threw Robespierre overboard like this so as to strike more easily at those who had overthrown him, by representing them as his accomplices. But the Thermidorians grasped the manœuvre. There was murmuring. Raison interrupted him with: "We must needs be sure of the patriotism of Citizen Aigoin; he has proved himself on more than one occasion, and his zeal is not in question; but it cannot be denied that he has wandered from the aim which he laid down for his speech. Most of his arguments merely

<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Lb<sup>40</sup> 2330.

tend to give some substance to the slanders put forward by Lecointre (of Versailles) and his adherents, and victoriously rebutted by the National Convention itself." Aigoin protested that his principles were pure. He wished to continue, but the murmuring began again. The draft address to the Convention which he proposed at the end of his speech was rejected without discussion.

A few days later the Thermidorians closed the Jacobin Club. Most of the old members of the Mountain kept silence, but Aigoin again tried to resist. In a pamphlet entitled "Down with brigands and blood-suckers!" he began a violent attack on the Dantonist Legendre and his hangers-on, whom he represented as a band of "brigands and scoundrels, embezzlers and bosses, extortioners, and ex-torturers." He recalled their crimes, he denounced them as traitors who dressed up in the cap of liberty the better to betray the Republic and the country, and he extolled the true martyrs for liberty: "And you, Marat, Bayle, Beauvais, Chalier, Gasparin, Fabre (of Hérault), are we never again to offer you our love, our homage and our regrets?" The name of Robespierre was not in the list. Yielding to the taste of the day, or else out of tactics, because he wanted people to read his speech, Aigoin even glorified the 9th Thermidor, which had meted out justice to traitors and tyrants. He added, it is true, that those whom he was attacking had been their slaves and accomplices. Then he fell with renewed violence upon those whom he called "the patriots of the 9th Thermidor." "You, patriots of the 9th Thermidor, you are more republican than we, who overthrew the Bastille, led the tyrant in chains and fought against all the conspirators." He did not hesitate to censure the closing of the Jacobins, whose services he recalled.



This courageous pamphlet was inevitably bound to mark him down for the vengeance of the reactionaries.

On the 12th Germinal the workmen of Paris marched on the Convention to demand bread and the Constitution of 1793. On the morrow of this unsuccessful attempt Aigoïn was arrested as an accomplice of the insurgents, and locked up in the prison of Le Plessis. He protested vigorously against the accusation of which he was the object, in two memorials which he addressed to the Committee of General Security, and in a letter to Gauthier, deputy for Ain. During the eighteen months which he had spent in Paris, he said, he had confined himself to his functions as Commissary at the Treasury. He saw scarcely anybody save the deputy Bonnier, who was from his own part of the country. He did not know personally ten deputies in Paris. He never went to the outlying quarters of the town. He had never appeared at sectional meetings or in public places. He added that he had always been on the side of order, that he had protected the Federalists of Hérault, that he had opposed extreme measures, that he had sent in memorials to the Committee of Public Safety for the suppression of the law of the maximum and the resumption of commercial activity.<sup>1</sup> Another day, he recalled his republican past. He had been preparing for Revolution since 1788. He had always served it at the cost of his health, his rest, his fortune, and all his affections. He had always been a stranger to personal spite. He had rendered services to his greatest enemies; he had forgiven

<sup>1</sup> It is relevant to mention here that Aigoïn's brother-in-law, Brunet, formerly a member of the departmental administration of Hérault, had from the first, under Raison and Goujon, been director of the commission on food-stuffs set up in connection with the Committee of Public Safety.

and even saved them. "In the department of Hérault I broke the iron sceptre of the Hébertists, and of the bloody and predatory partisans of Robespierre who were making the best citizens groan under their yoke, and by my personal influence I have prevented the blood of patriots from being shed in the department under the pretext of federalism, as it was shed in floods in the neighbouring departments." He ended with an attempt to touch his opponents' hearts: "My wife and young children have no other resources but my exertions and the resumption of my business. My former partners (Lajard and Brunet) will take out fresh articles of association without me if I am not forthwith restored to them."

Aigoin's wife, whose maiden name was Brunet, took repeated steps on behalf of her husband. On the 16th Germinal, Year III, she appeared before the Committee of General Security, accompanied by a female friend, Citoyenne Grenus,<sup>1</sup> and asked permission to communicate with the prisoner. "The weak state of his health makes them doubly desirous of receiving this consolation promptly."<sup>2</sup>

Overcoming her repugnance, she presented herself four times, accompanied by her brother, at the house of the deputy Courtois, who had charge of her husband's case.<sup>3</sup> She did not find Courtois at home, and resolved to write to him on the 13th Floréal. She protested against the accusation brought against Aigoin of being one of the organizers of the outbreak on the 12th Germinal. As early as the 9th Germinal, she said, Aigoin had

<sup>1</sup> No doubt the wife of the banker of that name. See our note on the two Grenus in the *Annales révolutionnaires* of October–December 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Letter included among the papers.

<sup>3</sup> Courtois then lived at 48 Faubourg St.-Honoré, in the house of an *émigré*, the Comte de Langeron.

sent in his resignation from the position of commissary at the Treasury, through the agency of the representative Johannot. "Since then he has done nothing but prepare for our departure to Montpellier, where he was going to resume his trade and business, which had been interrupted for more than a year by the decree of the Convention summoning him to Paris." On the 12th Germinal, far from mixing in politics, he was buying from a dealer the three horses required for his journey, and was busy buying a carriage for the same purpose. If he had attended the Convention, it was purely out of curiosity. "My husband's fellow-townsmen, who lived on the most intimate terms with him, among others your colleagues Rabaud, Cambacérès, Jac, Joubert and Bonnier (the latter was then visiting our house daily), can set your minds at rest as to the purity of his civism; and representative Perrin (of the Vosges) told me he had received letters vouching for it from the departmental administration of Hérault."

Madame Aigoin had collected proofs of her allegations. On the 11th Floréal, Chibourg, the master-saddler of the Rue Helvétius, formerly Rue Sainte-Anne, certified that Aigoin had visited him during the morning of the 12th Germinal to look at a coach which he was having repaired. This coach was to be ready by the 22nd Germinal, the date fixed for his departure from Paris.

A number of merchants and important personages of Montpellier, Garnier senior, Blanc, B. Luchaire senior, Bastide, A. F. Blonquier, L. Granier, Puech junior, Gourgas, Sabatier, Dunat, Barrau, Fignier, Sepet, Chauvet, Astier, etc., interceded with the Committee of General Security in a letter dated the 6th Floréal: "We owe it to the cause of truth to inform you that, during the

first three years of the Revolution, we have seen that he (Aigoin) was passionately devoted to the new order of things which was being established, that he co-operated to the utmost of his power in founding the empire of liberty in these climes, and that his soul was consistently frank and honourable, and, to all appearance, imbued with the love of his country. If Aigoin is capable of any fanaticism, it can be none but a patriotic one. One word will suffice to characterize Aigoin : while energetically combating his friends' opinions, we have always seen him do justice to their intentions, and use all his influence to save them from proscription. We call upon you to restore him to his family, his friends and his business."

Lastly, Doublet, the hospital physician, certified on the 9th Floréal, "that Citizen Aigoin, formerly Commissary at the National Treasury, resident at No. 668 Rue Helvétius, had been suffering all the winter from a rheumatic tendency or a sort of gout, manifesting itself sometimes externally and sometimes internally, and that his complaint had appeared in a more acute form in the early spring days ; but Citizen Aigoin would not stop at home for more than two days, or submit to the dieting and treatment which were needed to cure him."

These certificates, and, in addition, the intervention of the deputies from Hérault, produced an impression, and the Committee of General Security decided to release Aigoin from prison, by the following order placing him under surveillance at Montpellier :

*20th Floréal, Year III of the Republic.*

"In consequence of the representations of Rabout-Pommier and Joubert, representatives of the people, the Committee of General Security order that Citizen Aigoin, at present confined in the



house of detention of Le Plessis, shall be transferred under guard of a gendarme, at his own expense, to Montpellier, there to remain in a state of confinement in the house of detention of that commune till further notice.

Courtois, Pémartin, Perrin, Pierre Guyomar, Monmayou, Sarret, Kervelegan, Sevestre, Bergoeing ; representatives of the people and members of the Committee of General Security."

But though Aigoin numbered many friends at Montpellier, even among his political opponents, they were not all disarmed. The *procureur-syndic* of the district of Caïtergues denounced him to the Convention in Messidor, Year III, and enclosed with his denunciation a letter which Aigoin had written to the Revolutionary Committee of Montpellier during the trial of the Girondins.<sup>1</sup> On the 7th Thermidor, Year III, the Committee of General Security passed the following ordinance :

"The Committee of General Security, being informed of a denunciation concerning Citizen F.-V. Aigoin of Montpellier subsequent to his release, annuls its order of the 4th for his discharge and the unsealing of his papers ; it orders the administrative commission of the police not to put the said order into execution.

Bailly, Bergoeing, Kervelegan, Pierret (Secretary), Lamont, Rovère, Mariette ; members of the Committee of General Security."

So Aigoin remained in prison. But time was working in his favour. The Royalist sections of Paris were fired upon by Bonaparte on the 13th Vendémiaire of the Year IV. On the following day the former friend of Robespierre petitioned for release. His letter had the following note

<sup>1</sup> Duval-Jouve, t. II, p. 119, note.

added to it by Florent Guiot, a member of the Convention: "I recommend to my colleagues the petition of Citizen Aigoin, a true and pure patriot." It is probable that this banker and supporter of the Mountain benefited by the general amnesty voted by the Convention at its last session.

From that time onwards I lose all trace of him. He no doubt retired into private life, like so many other good citizens who had been carried right out of themselves by the great wave of patriotism and humanitarianism which characterized the French Revolution.

Aigoin's letters have an interest exceeding that of his own unimportant personality. They reveal the immense prestige of Robespierre among sincere revolutionaries. The banker of Languedoc, by the admission even of his political opponents, was a disinterested, self-sacrificing man, sincere in his convictions. When he asked Robespierre to stand godfather to his child no selfish calculations were mingled with the honour which he desired to do to the statesman whom he valued as the saviour of his country and the incarnation of the new creed. He was no flatterer. Robespierre's campaign against the Girondins at the outset of the war seemed to him exaggerated and untimely. He told him so. If he afterwards came over to his opinion, it is because he had learnt from the facts. He took the side of the Mountain because he considered that they alone were capable of defending the Republic and driving back the enemy. He was no place-hunter. Honours came to him without his having sought them. At the Treasury he carried out his functions conscientiously, and did not fail to point out, when necessity arose, the disadvantages of such a popular law as that of the maximum.

The mitigations of terrorist policy in the economic sphere, introduced after the fall of the Hébertists and Dantonists, were perhaps not uninfluenced by his advice. Nor should I be surprised if the criticisms of Cambon's financial expedients enunciated by Robespierre towards the end of his career, and particularly in his speech of the 8th Thermidor, were inspired, at least in part, by the banker of Languedoc. In any case, I am struck by the fact that when all the deputies from Hérault intervened in his favour at the time of his imprisonment Cambon kept silence. Cambon is not once named in the whole of this voluminous collection of papers.

It was creditable to Aigoïn that he opposed the Thermidorian reaction. It is true that he too disowned Robespierre. But it is doubtful whether he was sincere in doing so. The Thermidorians would not have persecuted him with such bitterness if they had really supposed that he disavowed Robespierre and his ideas from the bottom of his heart. Babeuf, too, attacked Robespierre after Thermidor, but he made reparation without delay to his great memory, and became one of his bravest defenders. It is probable that, when the storm was over, Aigoïn did the same, and inculcated into his little Maximilien the cult of his martyred godfather who personified for a generation the hopes of democracy.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROBESPIERRE AND THE CULT OF THE SUPREME BEING <sup>1</sup>

THE figure of Robespierre has been so much misrepresented during the last twenty years, even by republican historians, that to talk of the "Incorruptible's" religious ideas nowadays may seem a rash undertaking.

Robespierre, it is proclaimed, was a narrow intelligence, a man of the *ancien régime*, a coldly ambitious nature who desired to reign over France by imposing upon the country, through the Terror, a counterfeit Catholicism, a deism glorified into a religion of State.

I cannot hope to study here the whole religious policy of Robespierre backed up by the documents and proofs.

It must suffice to choose one example; to examine precisely what part was played by Robespierre in the establishment of the Cult of the Supreme Being: especially since this is the usual butt of all his detractors.

What do the republican historians hostile to Robespierre say? They contrast the Cult of the Supreme Being with the Cult of Reason. The Cult of Reason, which they praise unreservedly, was, according to them, the Hébertist party's own creation. It was, they say, a pantheistic or even atheistical cult, a means of intellectual emancipation. The Cult of the Supreme Being,

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires* for April-June 1910.



on the contrary, they allege to have been invented by Robespierre, in all its details, for the satisfaction of his unbridled ambitions and mystical passions. It was, they say, an attempt at political enslavement and intellectual reaction.

Now, however generally accepted this contrast between the two revolutionary cults may be, it is none the less false. Far from having been the invention of a few men, Chaumette, Fouché, Hébert, and Cloots, or even of a party, the Cult of Reason was merely the culminating point in a series of civic festivals, the origin of which goes back to the great Feast of the Federation of July 14, 1790.<sup>1</sup> The Festival of Reason resembled all the preceding ones. The same odes were sung, the same processions went through their evolutions, the same patriotic emotion stirred men's hearts at the sight of the same republican symbols. The new feature of the 20th Brumaire, Year II, the day on which the Commune and the Convention glorified Reason in Notre-Dame de Paris, was not even the place chosen for the ceremony—a cathedral—for churches had already witnessed similar scenes beneath their vaulted roofs. The new feature was this : that the fall of constitutional Catholicism, the secularization of the churches, and the abdication of the priests coincided with this festival.

But even the overthrow of the constitutional Church cannot be ascribed to the Hébertist party alone, for the Girondins themselves, such as Pierre Manuel, Guadet and Vergniaud, had worked for it energetically since the days of the Legislative Assembly.

Nor was the solemn abdication of the Archbishop of Paris, Gobel, which gave an impulse to the

<sup>1</sup> As I have proved in my *Origines des cultes révolutionnaires*, Paris, Cornely, 1904.

dechristianizing movement, exclusively the work of the Hébertists; for it arose from the initiative of Pereira, Proli and their friends, the party of the *Enragés* (rabid extremists) which had its centre in the people's societies in the sections, and caused the Commune and Convention a moment's alarm; and the initiative of the people's societies was seconded by some notoriously moderate men, such as Thuriot, Basire and Chabot.<sup>1</sup> The truth is that the Hébertists, Chaumette, Cloots, and Hébert were merely falling into line with the obscure patriots of the sections, the nameless crowd of sans-culottes in the outlying parts of Paris.

Finally—and even M. Aulard, the personal enemy of Robespierre, has had to note this—the Supreme Being did not wait for Robespierre's sanction before being adored in the temples of Reason, by the same right, and at the same time, as Nature, Liberty, the Fatherland and Reason herself. We have a large number of speeches delivered in the temples of Reason. Pantheistic declarations—still more, atheistical ones—are the exception among them. We cannot pretend to know history better than those living at the time, who made history and lived through it; and they made no distinction between the two revolutionary cults, which they call indifferently by the same names. The Cult of the Supreme Being was in their eyes no more than a revised and amended sequel to the Cult of Reason. It was the same cult, the same institution, continued and improved.

It was Robespierre's enemies, the former Hébertists and Dantonists, who, in order to justify their conduct on the 9th Thermidor,

<sup>1</sup> See the essay on Robespierre and dechristianization in my book *La Révolution et l'Église*.

tried after the event to travesty their victim as a dictator who made use of the religious idea as a means of domination. It was they who first spoke of Robespierre's "pontificate." But must the "Incorruptible" always be judged on the evidence of his implacable enemies?

One simple observation reduces this slander to insignificance. Never was the alleged dictator more challenged, more opposed, more impotent than on the morrow of the establishment of the Cult of the Supreme Being! On the morrow of the Festival of the 20th Prairial, opposition to him raised its head even in the Committee of Public Safety. The festival itself, by the ease with which it lent itself to a perfidious interpretation of his intentions, fed this opposition, which had other causes than religious disagreements; but these causes were such that his opponents could not avow them all.

Curiously enough, those very historians who can only see the Cult of the Supreme Being through the eyes of the Thermidorians, will only look at the Cult of Reason through those of Robespierre. Carried away by the heat of the struggle against the Hébertists, Robespierre had represented their leaders as preachers of Atheism; and Atheism horrified him, not only because he believed in the social necessity of faith in God, but, above all, because he feared that to preach it to a people ill prepared for it might destroy the very foundations of moral life. Robespierre's fears were exaggerated, his accusations ill-founded. The festivals of Reason were in no wise atheistical. Their organizers, whose ambitions were limited to replacing the Catholic Mass by a civic one, believed that the crowd could not dispense with some sort of worship. They were, for the most part, no more *advanced*, no more secularists, in

our sense of the word, than Robespierre himself ; men of all parties had experienced a sort of "moral dismay" (*effroi moral*) at the suppression of every form of worship. This was the expression used by one of them, Baudot, a deputy of the Mountain.

The mistake of the historians further springs from the method, or rather absence of method, with which they have approached the study of a question in which it is already so difficult to be impartial, since it is closely connected with our most intimate thoughts, and the bases of our way of life ; up to the present the revolutionary cults have only been studied from the political, never from the religious, point of view. Historians, both of the Right and the Left, have only considered the Cult of Reason from the point of view of a party move. They have confused its history with that of the Hébertists. Similarly, they have made the Cult of the Supreme Being a chapter in the history of Robespierre and his party. They have denied that either of these cults was inspired by the religious sentiment, though they were at least as deeply animated by it as the old churches, which were already fossilized.

The mistake of the historians is to a certain extent comprehensible. The revolutionary cults were not like others. Belief in the supernatural was not the essential point in them. The religion of which they were the tangible expression is a religion without mysteries, revelation, or fetishes, a religion in which the act of faith and adoration applies not to a mystical object, but to the political institution in itself, the *Patrie*, as they called it—that is to say, to a just and fraternal society swayed by good laws, to the Fatherland conceived as the source and means of happiness, of moral



as well as of material happiness. The revolutionary creed, being bound up with the Revolution itself, faithfully reflected the whole political life of that tragic period. The fact that it was actually directed towards a political object is no reason for refusing it a religious character. A faith which takes man as a whole, and raises him above the vulgarities of existence in order to make him capable of devotion and sacrifice, even though it be concerned with a secular ideal, is a faith at least as worthy of respect as all those which have as their object some magic operation.

I am ashamed to insist upon this. But the view according to which Robespierre was the creator of the Cult of the Supreme Being cannot stand examination. The essential point of the revolutionary religion was the adoration of the Republic of Liberty and Equality, novel words of which the prestige was still unimpaired: the rest, the metaphysical side, was merely secondary. No doubt a certain conception of society is bound to be accompanied by a corresponding conception of the Universe. Political convictions act and react upon philosophic convictions, and vice versa. Now the great majority of members of the Convention, and almost all Frenchmen, unanimously believed in God. This did not prevent them from believing in the Fatherland—that Fatherland which meant to them far less their native soil than the ideal society in which the human race was one day to find refuge. By placing the republican cult under the protection of the Supreme Being, Robespierre was doing no more than interpret public feeling, and this was the reason of the enthusiasm which he aroused.

There was not the slightest novelty in the

proposition which he submitted to the Convention on the 18th Floréal, Year II; not the slightest tinge of invention, or even of personal initiative. It was not on his motion that the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which is prefaced to the Constitution voted in June 1793, was placed under the auspices of the Supreme Being. Ever since that date—that is to say, for a year past—the Supreme Being had been in the Constitution; it requires all M. Aulard's passion to suppose that André Pomme, the deputy from Cayenne, who, as early as April 1793, demanded that the Supreme Being should be maintained in the preamble of the Declaration of the Rights of Man: that André Pomme was an agent of Robespierre. This is how M. Aulard puts it: [In April 1793] "Robespierre did not yet dare to put himself forward, and it was an obscure deputy for Cayenne, André Pomme, who sounded public opinion. His ill success postponed the 'Incorruptible's' scheme until he believed his opponents to have been suppressed or overawed."<sup>1</sup> So little was André Pomme a follower of Robespierre, that he abstained from the voting by roll-call on the impeachment of Marat, whereas Robespierre not only voted against it, but protested from the tribune against the accusation. M. Aulard's *hypothesis* is nothing but a mere insinuation, destitute of all probability. How can he represent Robespierre, as early as April 1793, as cherishing not only the intention of establishing the Cult of the Supreme Being, but that of suppressing the Dantonists, when at that date Robespierre was still acting in concert with Danton, and his chief concern at the time was to combat the Girondins? M. Aulard, however, lays it down as a principle that Robespierre was a hypocrite, skilful at concealing his game!

<sup>1</sup> *Le Culte de la Raison*, 2nd ed., p. 266.

But who has given him this information about Robespierre's hidden motives? What clairvoyante? At any rate, the documents tell us nothing of the sort. Though André Pomme's motion was not carried in April 1793, the Convention adopted it in June of the same year—that is to say, a year before Robespierre revived it on his own account in Floréal, Year II!

If M. Aulard had been less blinded by his preconceived theories, he would have grasped that in Floréal, Year II, far from initiating an independent course of action, Robespierre was doing nothing but interpret a wish definitely expressed by the Convention itself, a wish, moreover, urgently dictated by the political situation.

In Floréal, Year II, the Committee of Public Safety had just triumphed, not without difficulty, over the double opposition of the Dantonists and Hébertists, who were executed in Germinal. It was making efforts to prevent the return of the groups against which it had had to struggle for many months past. It was effecting the abolition of ministers, who were replaced by commissions subject to its control. It was placing the representatives on mission in closer subordination to itself, "in order," as Couthon said on the 17th Germinal, "to maintain unity of action between them and recall them all to the centre of government." It was the means of effecting this unity of action which was exercising the minds of the Committee, as well as of the Convention itself. Now the representatives on mission complained in their correspondence that the measures dealing with worship were lacking in coherence and uniformity. They called for a general decree to regulate the conditions of the dechristianizing process and the establishment of republican festivals for the whole country. There

should be unity not only in the government, but also in its executive measures, and, still more, in men's hearts and minds throughout the country. The Committee of Public Safety decided to accede to the desire expressed so frequently by most of the representatives on mission. On the 17th Germinal, Couthon—not Robespierre; but, for M. Aulard, Couthon and Robespierre are one and the same person, like André Pomme and Robespierre just now—Couthon announced to the Convention that the Committee of Public Safety would shortly propose “a plan for a tenth-day festival dedicated to the Eternal, the comforting idea of which has not been taken from the people by the Hébertists.” Couthon's words met with applause. Nobody raised the slightest objection.

In order to understand the joy with which the Convention hailed Couthon's project, we should not only remember that the great majority of the Assembly held deistical opinions, but we should take into consideration the necessities arising out of the religious situation.

At that time dechristianization was already fairly advanced, but not complete. The representatives on mission had requested the priests to abjure their religion, and transformed the secularized churches into republican temples. By the aid of the people's societies, they had endeavoured to replace Sunday by Décadi (the tenth day), and to make the people forget the ancient Mass by means of a civic service. Their measures had not been prearranged. They were somewhat varied in character. In some places rest on the tenth day was made obligatory for ordinary members of the public under penalty of a fine. In others Sunday rest was tolerated. In some places the tenth day was celebrated under the



auspices of the people's society, in others the republican cult had the municipal officials as its priests. In some places republican missionaries, usually twelve in number, to recall the twelve apostles of the sans-culotte Jesus, were appointed to preach this gospel in the country districts. In others civic books of ritual were published, services for the decade, or ten-day week, or patriotic weekly devotions (such as *Le Décadaire du haut-Rhin*, the *Documents de la Raison*, etc.). In some places the martyrs of liberty were venerated—Marat, Chalier, Le Pelletier and Brutus—in others this veneration was regarded as superstitious. Baptisms, marriages and burials were generally carried out with a lay ceremonial; but this ceremonial varied. The task was to remove these differences, to regulate and organize the republican worship which had so far grown up haphazard. It had also to be in some measure legalized. The Republican Calendar, instituted in October 1793, was a mere skeleton. Every tenth day had to be consecrated to some particular civic ceremony. It was necessary to distinguish national festivals from the ordinary tenth-day celebrations. There was room for reducing all these unco-ordinated and desultory experiments to some system. Catholicism, men said to one another, would not be definitively vanquished unless it was replaced by a corresponding system, equally well co-ordinated, uniform and well regulated.

For several months past the Committee of Public Instruction had been repeatedly requested to draft a decree which should introduce into the celebration of civic festivals the order which they lacked. The Committee set to work. In Ventôse, Year II, Mathieu, a deputy for Oise, presented a completed draft on behalf of the Committee.

He proposed to institute, on the one hand, five national festivals consecrated to the memory of the outstanding dates of the Revolution: July 14, August 10, October 6, January 21, May 31; and, on the other hand, as many special festivals as there were Décadis in the year. Each of these tenth-day festivals should be "placed under the auspices of the Supreme Being, and consecrated to one particular virtue." It should consist of speeches and hymns, to take place in the "temples of Reason," and of military and athletic exercises. Schoolmasters should be obliged to bring their pupils to them.

The Convention gave Mathieu's report a hearing, and decided that his project should be submitted to the Committee of Public Safety, which should carry it into effect. It was indeed for the government, that is to say, the Committee of Public Safety, to say the last word on a matter of such importance. By the 17th Germinal Couthon announced, as we have seen, that the Committee of Public Safety had taken cognizance of Mathieu's project, and was going to devise means for carrying it into effect.

This simple record shows us that, contrary to M. Aulard's assertions, it was not Robespierre who proposed the establishment of the Cult of the Supreme Being on his own initiative. Robespierre's enemies are left with the resource of claiming that the Convention, which ordered the Committee of Public Instruction to prepare a scheme for the tenth-day festivals, the Committee, which acted on these instructions, Mathieu, who handed in his report in the name of the Committee, and Couthon, who gave it the support of the Committee of Public Safety, were mere marionettes manipulated by the Pontiff from behind the scenes.

To the historian who takes his stand upon the documents, and is not inspired by hatred, the matter presents itself in a perfectly natural light. The Committee of Public Safety entrusted Robespierre with the report which had to be presented on the subject of the project drawn up by Mathieu, because, for several months past, Robespierre had been entrusted with all reports concerning general policy.

Robespierre confined himself to appropriating Mathieu's project almost without a change, but he prefaced it with a long report, in which he defined and justified the aim which the Republic was trying to achieve by the institution of national festivals. Here again, he did no more than recall, in a systematic form, ideas current at the time, which had frequently been voiced since the famous memorandum on public instruction composed by Talleyrand in the latter days of the Constituent Assembly ; but he added importance to these well-worn ideas by his marvellous language and wonderful sincerity. He was never greater. His speech was listened to amid a truly religious silence, only interrupted from time to time by frenzied applause. This speech has all the force of a testament : not the testament of one man, but that of a whole generation, the generation which created the first Republic, and believed that by the Republic they were regenerating the world. For this reason it is worth while for us to pause over it for a moment.

The Revolution opens a new era in the history of humanity. This is the idea which Robespierre first brings into prominence ! He sees in the Revolution at once the culminating point of all earlier progress and the point of departure for all progress in the future. In a few brief phrases he recalls the victories of the human intelligence :

“The world has changed, and is bound to change again. What is there in common between that which is and that which was? Civilized nations have taken the place of savages wandering in the desert; fruitful crops have taken the place of the ancient forests that covered the globe. A world has appeared beyond the limits of the world; the inhabitants of the earth have added the seas to their immeasurable domain; man has conquered the lightning and averted the thunderbolts of heaven. Compare the imperfect language of hieroglyphics with the miracles of printing; set the voyage of the Argonauts beside that of La Pérouse; measure the distance between the astronomical observations of the wise men of Asia and the discoveries of Newton, or between the sketch drawn by the hand of Dibutade and the pictures of David.”

What human reason has done for the knowledge and utilization of nature she must now accomplish for the happiness of societies, for there is a science of politics just as there is a science of the material world:

“All has changed in the physical order; all must change in the moral and political order. One half of the world-revolution is already achieved, the other half has yet to be accomplished. . . .”

To France belongs in some measure the honour, the mission, of accomplishing the political Revolution, overthrowing thrones which are now supported on nothing but “the league of the rich and of all subordinate oppressors.” And Robespierre is moved to hymn the praises of revolutionary France:



“The French people appear to have outstripped the rest of the human race by two thousand years ; one might even be tempted to regard them as a distinct species among the rest. Europe is kneeling to the shadows of the tyrants whom we are punishing.

In Europe a ploughman or an artisan is an animal trained to do the pleasure of a noble ; in France the nobles seek to transform themselves into ploughmen and artisans, and cannot even obtain this honour.

Europe cannot conceive of life without kings and nobles ; and we cannot conceive of it with them.

Europe is lavishing her blood to rivet the fetters on humanity ; and we to break them.

Our sublime neighbours discourse gravely to the universe of the King's health, amusements and travels ; they insist upon informing posterity of the time at which he dined, the moment at which he returned from hunting, the happy soil which had the honour of being trodden by his august feet at each hour of the day, the names of the privileged slaves who appeared in his presence at the rising and the setting sun.

As for us, we shall make known to it the names and virtues of the heroes who died in the fight for liberty ; we shall make known to it on what soil the last satellites of tyrants bit the dust ; we shall make known to it the hour which sounded the death-knell of the oppressors of the world.

Yes, this delightful land which we inhabit, which Nature favours with her caresses, is made to be the domain of liberty and happiness ; this proud and sensitive people is truly born for glory and virtue. O my country, had fate caused me to be born in a foreign and distant land, I should have addressed to heaven my constant prayers

for thy prosperity ; I should have shed tears of emotion at the story of thy combats and thy virtues ; my eager soul would have followed with ardent anxiety every movement of thy glorious Revolution ; I should have envied the lot of thy citizens, I should have envied that of thy representatives. . . . O sublime nation ! Receive the sacrifice of all my being ; happy is he who is born in thy midst ! Still happier he who can die for thy happiness !”

But France will only fulfil her mission—namely, to deliver the world from kings and priests—if she applies the principles of strict justice in her own Government. For Robespierre, as for the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, politics is merely a branch of morality, a morality in action.

“ The sole foundation of civil society is morality ! . . . Immorality is the basis of despotism, as virtue is the essence of the Republic. . . .”

Robespierre then showed that all the crises of the Revolution had been caused by more or less avowed agents of despotism—that is to say, of crime : by “ Lafayette, who invoked the Constitution in order to restore the royal power ” ; by Dumouriez, “ who invoked the Constitution in order to protect the Girondin faction against the National Convention ” ; by Brissot, who desired to turn the Constitution into “ a shield to parry the blow which menaced the throne ” ; by “ Hébert and his accomplices, who demanded the sovereignty of the people in order to slaughter the National Convention and annihilate the republican government ” ; by Danton, “ indulgent to every crime, involved in every plot, promising protection to villains and fidelity to patriots ;

adroitly explaining away his treachery by the pretext of the public weal. . . ." Coming to his real subject, Robespierre examined into the means of putting an end to these crises, and defined the principles which ought to guide the Convention, and with which it ought to imbue the souls of Frenchmen, so that they might at last become insensible to the snares of despotism.

"Study the good of the country and the interests of humanity alone. Every institution, every doctrine which consoles and elevates men's souls ought to be welcomed; reject all those which tend to degrade and corrupt them. Encourage and exalt all generous sentiments and great moral ideas which men have attempted to extinguish; draw together by the charm of friendship and the bonds of virtue those men whom there have been attempts to divide. . . ."

In other words, Robespierre put forward social utility as the test of doctrines, and advised the preaching of deism, not so much because it was a true doctrine, as because it was a doctrine of social utility. In extolling the social benefits of belief in God, he finds expressions which are not lacking in beauty :

"You who lament a virtuous friend, you love to think that what is finest in him has escaped death! You who weep over the bier of a son or a wife, are you consoled by him who tells you that all that remains of them is base dust? Wretch expiring beneath the assassin's blow, your last sigh is an appeal to eternal justice! Innocence on the scaffold makes the tyrant turn pale upon his triumphal chariot: would it have this power if the tomb levelled the oppressor with

the oppressed? Wretched sophist! By what right dost thou come and wrest the sceptre of reason from innocence, to place it in the hands of crime, to encourage vice, to sadden virtue and to degrade humanity? The more richly a man is endowed with sensibility and genius, the more attached he is to ideas which expand his being and elevate his heart; and the doctrine of men of that stamp becomes that of the universe. Ah! Can such ideas be other than truths? At any rate I cannot conceive how nature can have suggested to men fictions more beneficial than all realities; and if the existence of God, if the immortality of the soul were but dreams, they would still be the finest of all the conceptions of human intelligence."

As if he foresaw that this adherence to deism would be used against him, and taken advantage of to represent him as a Christian in disguise and an intolerant person, Robespierre at once added:

"I need hardly say that there is no question here of arraigning any particular philosophical opinions, or of denying that this or that philosopher may be virtuous, whatever his opinions may be, and even in spite of them, by virtue of a fortunate disposition or a superior intelligence. The point is to consider nothing but Atheism, in so far as it is national in character and bound up with a system of conspiracy against the Republic.

Ah! What does it matter to you, legislators, by what varied hypotheses certain philosophers explain the phenomena of nature? You may hand over all these subjects to their everlasting discussions: it is neither as metaphysicians nor as theologians that you have to consider them.



In the eyes of the legislator, truth is all that is useful and of practical good to the world."

This declaration, by which Robespierre upheld in principle the right of free thought, was not merely an oratorical precaution. A few days later, on the 26th Floréal, when one of his friends, the younger Julien, proposed at the Jacobins to expel atheists from the Republic, in accordance with Rousseau's advice, Robespierre opposed it vigorously and with success.

Robespierre held to the idea of God; but he did so because this idea has a social value, for public morality appeared to him to depend upon it. We may remark that he never tried to define God or prove His existence. God appeared to him as a sort of verbal fetish for galvanizing moral ideas—a precious fetish, for the happiness of the masses is bound up with its preservation. And Robespierre recalled the devotion which this fetish had aroused in the past. He attacked the encyclopædists, whom he regarded, with much reason, as bourgeois epicureans, very conservative in the sphere of social ideas. He contrasted them with their master Rousseau, who, for his part, loved the people without reservation.

He included in the sect of the encyclopædists all those who betrayed liberty during the Revolution: the Girondins, the Dantonists, the Hébertists, who all, if he is to be believed, made a show of combating fanaticism, but in reality served its cause by their excesses as much as by their indulgence. For the purpose of beating down fanaticism, neither violence nor weakness is necessary in his eyes, but a clear-sighted firmness.

"Fanatics, hope for nothing from us. To

recall men to the pure cult of the Supreme Being is to strike a death-blow at fanaticism. All fictions disappear before the truth, and all follies collapse before Reason. Without compulsion, without persecution, all sects must mingle spontaneously in the universal religion of Nature. We shall counsel you, then, to maintain the principles which you have hitherto displayed. May the liberty of worship be respected, that reason may triumph indeed, but let it not disturb public order or become a means of conspiracy. If counter-revolutionary malignity is shielding itself beneath this pretext, repress it, and, for the rest, rely upon the might of principle and the innate force of things."

We see from this how Robespierre's religious policy differed from that of the *Exagérés*. Robespierre and the Hébertists aimed at the same end : dechristianization. But they tended towards it by different means. The *Exagérés* wished to suppress all religious ceremonies, whether public or private, by the speediest means, and, if necessary, by violence. They closed the churches, arrested the priests or forced them to abdicate, and regarded every act of Catholicism as an offence or a crime, even if performed in private. Robespierre, on his side, censured the use of force ; he desired that peaceable and sincere Catholics should be allowed to continue their practices, provided that these did not become a pretext for meetings of aristocrats. He considered that the churches which had been closed should remain closed ; he recognized the right of the communes to shut those which were still open ; he was to applaud further suppressions, provided that they were carried out without violence ; but he invariably demanded that religious liberty should

be respected, at least in private. Any Catholic demonstration of any kind, provided that it was not at the same time in any way aristocratic, did not seem to him a punishable offence. The activity of the *Exagérés* was above all a negative one. They were concerned rather with destroying Catholicism than with finding a substitute for it. They did, indeed, open temples of Reason, but they taught in them political truths rather than moral and transcendental ones. Robespierre, on his side, desired to carry out a positive work. He did not believe that civic preaching was enough to take the place of that Catholicism which had been suppressed. For him the moral and social point of view outweighed the political one. In his eyes Catholicism was not only an elaborate system of domination, an admirable machine for making slaves ; it was also a rule of life, a morality. And, as Robespierre understands it, the civic religion should also have its morality and rule of life. He believed that, in basing it upon the two social dogmas of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, he was supplying it with one. Thus, he thought, the transition between the old and the new religion, between Catholicism and liberty, would be gently prepared. Thus the mass of the people, impregnated for centuries with the Catholic spirit, would rally definitively to the Republic.

Robespierre was so convinced of the superiority of his method of crushing the enemy that he saluted its final fall with enthusiasm :

“ Ambitious priests, do not wait for us to work for the restoration of your dominance ; such an enterprise would indeed be beyond our power. It is you who have killed yourselves, and one can no more return to moral life than to physical

existence. Besides, what is there in common between the priests and God? Priests are to morality what charlatans are to medicine. How different is the God of nature from the God of the priests! The God of nature knows nothing which resembles Atheism so much as priest-made religions. By dint of distorting the Supreme Being, they have destroyed Him, as much as in them lay; they have made of Him sometimes a ball of fire, sometimes an ox, sometimes a tree, sometimes a man, sometimes a king. The priests have created God in their own image; they have made Him jealous, capricious, greedy, cruel and implacable. They have treated Him as the Mayors of the Palace in olden days treated the descendant of Clovis, in order to reign in his name and put themselves in his place. They have relegated Him to heaven as to a palace, and have only brought Him down to earth in order to demand tithes, riches, honours, pleasure and power for their own profit. The real priest of the Supreme Being is Nature; His temple, the universe; His worship, virtue; His festivals, the joy of a great people gathered together beneath His eyes in order to draw close the sweet bonds of universal brotherhood and offer Him the homage of pure and feeling hearts."

The national festivals would form the common consciousness of the nation. Robespierre considers them "the most powerful means of regeneration";

"May they all tend to arouse those generous sentiments which are the charm and adornment of human life: enthusiasm for liberty, love of country and respect for law. May the memory of tyrants and traitors be held up to execration



at them ; may that of heroes of liberty and benefactors of humanity receive the just tribute of public gratitude ; may they draw their interest, and their very names, from the immortal events of our Revolution, and even from the things dearest and most sacred to the heart of man ; may they be beautified and distinguished by emblems suggesting their special objects. Let us invite nature and all the virtues to our festivals ; let them all be celebrated under the auspices of the Supreme Being ; let them be consecrated to Him, and let them open and close with a tribute to His power and goodness."

Finally, after pronouncing a eulogy on the young heroes Bara and Viala, he wound up his speech by proposing to the Convention a decree, which ran as follows :

"I. The French people recognizes the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.

II. It recognizes that worship worthy of the Supreme Being consists in the practice of the duties of man.

III. It places in the forefront of such duties those of detesting bad faith and tyranny, of punishing tyrants and traitors, of helping the unfortunate, of respecting the weak, of defending the oppressed, of doing to others all the good that lies within one's power, and of being unjust to nobody.

IV. Festivals shall be instituted to recall to men the thought of the Godhead and the dignity of existence.

V. These festivals shall borrow their names from the glorious events of our Revolution, from

the virtues dearest and most useful to man, and from the greatest benefits of nature.

VI. The French Republic shall celebrate every year the festivals of July 14, 1789, August 10, 1792, January 21, 1793, May 31, 1793.

VII. It shall celebrate on every Décadi, or tenth day, the festivals of which the list follows<sup>1</sup>:

To the Supreme Being and Nature.<sup>2</sup>

To the Human Race.

To the French People.

To the Benefactors of Humanity.

To the Martyrs for Liberty.

To Liberty and Equality.

To the Republic.

To the Liberty of the World.

To Love of Country.

To Hatred of Tyrants and Traitors.

To Truth.

To Justice.

To Modesty.

To Glory and Immortality.

To Friendship.

To Frugality.

To Courage.

To Good Faith.

To Heroism.

To Disinterestedness.

To Stoicism.

To Love.

To Conjugal Fidelity.

To Paternal Love.

To Maternal Affection.

To Filial Piety.

<sup>1</sup> This list was borrowed word for word from Mathieu's previous report.

<sup>2</sup> Observe the pantheistic formula: the Supreme Being and Nature.

To Childhood.  
 To Youth.  
 To Manhood.  
 To Old Age.  
 To Misfortune.  
 To Agriculture.  
 To Industry.  
 To Our Ancestors.  
 To Posterity.  
 To Happiness."

The closing article of this draft decree fixed the 20th Prairial as the date of a festival to be celebrated in honour of the Supreme Being, and announced the maintenance of liberty of worship, but within narrow limits.

The decree was carried without discussion in the midst of great enthusiasm. The Convention ordered that Robespierre's report should be translated into all languages, that 200,000 copies of it should be printed and sent to the communes, the armies and the people's societies, there to be read out and posted up in all public squares and camps. A few days later, on the 23rd Floréal, by an order of the Committee of Public Safety, the following inscription was carved over the doors of the churches: *The French people recognizes the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.* The national agents were instructed to read out Robespierre's speech in the republican temples on three consecutive tenth days.

Of all the festivals of the Revolution, the most popular and the most brilliant was certainly the Festival of the Supreme Being, celebrated in Paris and most of the great cities on the same day, the 20th Prairial, June 8.

In Paris, the great painter David was entrusted with the organization of the festival.

He had outlined the plan for it from the tribune of the Convention, on the 18th Floréal, and had a good month to prepare for its execution.<sup>1</sup>

The sun shone radiantly that day. "A sea of flowers," writes Michelet, "flooded Paris; roses and flowers of every kind were brought in from twenty leagues round, enough to decorate the houses and persons of a city of 700,000 souls."

The drums beat a tattoo, the bells rang full peal, and then the cannon thundered. The citizens of the forty-eight sections repaired in groups to the Tuileries in two columns, six deep, women on one side and men on the other; between the two columns the young people's battalion bore the banner of the section. The women carried flowers in their hands, the men boughs of oak. "The joy which beamed in every eye," says Tissot, the brother-in-law of Goujon, "was of a calm, religious character; the women were in ecstasy." Each section grouped itself round a post indicating its place in the Tuileries gardens.

At midday the Convention appeared in a body, its members wearing for the first time their official costumes, blue coats, knee-breeches, scarves and hats with tricolor plumes, each with a bunch of corn, flowers and fruit in his hands. They were led by Robespierre, who had been president of the Convention for four days. They took up their position on an amphitheatre with its back against the palace. A band played a tune to greet their arrival. Robespierre gave the signal. Silence fell upon the vast multitude. He began to speak in praise of belief in God.

" . . . He did not create kings to devour the human race; He did not create priests to harness

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Julien Tiersot, *Les fêtes et les chants de la Révolution française*, Hachette, 1908, Ch. VI.



us like grovelling beasts to the chariot of kings, and to give the world an example of baseness, pride, perfidy, debauchery and lies; but He created the universe to show forth His power; He created men to help and love each other, and to attain to happiness by way of virtue. . . .

When Robespierre had finished, singers from the opera performed the ode of Desorgues, set to music by Gossec :

Père de l'Univers, suprême Intelligence,  
 Bienfaiteur ignoré des aveugles mortels,  
 Tu révélas ton être à la reconnaissance,  
 Qui seule éleva tes autels !

(Father of the Universe, supreme Mind, the unknown Benefactor of blind mortals, Thou hast revealed thine essence to grateful hearts, who alone raised Thine altars !)

The singers of the sections, to whom the hymns for the ceremony had been taught on the days previous by members of the National Institute of Music, mingled their thousand voices with the choir of musicians from the Opera.

Robespierre seized a torch and set fire to a monument of Atheism, set up in the midst of the great pond. A statue of Wisdom emerged from the ashes of Atheism. Robespierre once more ascended the tribune, and made a second speech : " The monster which the genius of kings vomited upon France has returned to nothingness. May all the crimes and misfortunes of the world disappear with it ! Armed in turn with the daggers of fanaticism and the poison of Atheism, kings are for ever conspiring to murder humanity. Though they can no longer distort the Godhead by superstition in order to associate Him with their misdeeds, they endeavour to banish Him from the earth in order to reign there alone with crime."

This eloquence, in the fashion of that virtuous and impressionable century, made the most vivid impression upon contemporary minds. La Harpe, the fashionable man of letters, wrote and congratulated Robespierre. Boissy d'Anglas compared the orator to "Orpheus teaching mankind the principles of civilization and morality."

After a final hymn, the procession formed up ; the first twenty-four sections at the head, the last twenty-four in the rear ; between them the Convention, preceded by the National Institute of Music ; and in the midst of the deputies, an immense car on the antique model, draped in red and drawn by eight oxen with gilt horns ; on the car was a plough with a sheaf of wheat and a printing-press, both shaded by a tree of liberty. They moved off along the Seine towards the Champ de Mars, where the second part of the festival was to be carried out. As it passed before the Invalides, the soldiers maintained there at the expense of the Republic saluted the Convention by "raising their hands heavenwards and swearing together to die for liberty."

On the Champ de Mars an immense symbolic mountain occupied the former site of the Altar of the Fatherland. The Convention, led by Robespierre, ascended to the top of it, where a tree of liberty spread its shade. The musicians and singers, several thousand in number, took up their position on the sides, men on the right and women on the left. The young people's battalions surrounded the mountain, drawn up in square formation. The sections covered the plain. Incense was burnt. A trumpeter standing upon a pillar gave notice to the people when the chorus of the hymns was to be repeated in unison. Gossec conducted the music. A number

of hymns were chanted, including the famous one by M. J. Chénier :

Dieu du peuple, des rois, des cités, des campagnes,  
De Luther, de Calvin, des enfants d'Israël,  
Toi que le Guèbre adore au fond de ses montagnes,  
En invoquant l'astre du ciel.  
Ici sont rassemblés sous ton regard immense  
De l'empire français les fils et les soutiens.

(God of the people, of kings, of cities and of the country, of Luther, of Calvin, and of the children of Israel, Thou whom the fire-worshipper adores from the depths of his mountains, calling upon the heavenly orb, lo! here, beneath Thine all-embracing glance, are assembled the sons and upholders of the French empire.)

This hymn, says Tissot, “ produced a sort of inward thrill and religious absorption, which can hardly be expressed, though one experienced them among 500,000 witnesses, all sharing in the same emotion.”

A hundred thousand voices repeated the chorus, which contained the following oath :

Avant de déposer nos glaives triomphants,  
Jurons d'anéantir le crime et les tyrans.  
(Before we lay aside our triumphant swords,  
Let us take an oath to annihilate tyrants and crime.)

The men chanted the first verse, the women the next, and the chorus was taken up by the whole audience. Finally the girls tossed their flowers heavenwards, the young men drew their sabres, and the old men gave them their blessing. “ A general discharge of artillery, expressive of the national vengeance, rang through the air, and all the citizens of both sexes, mingling their feelings in a fraternal embrace, ended the festival by raising to heaven this cry of humanity and civism : ‘ Long live the Republic ! ’ ”<sup>1</sup>

M. Aulard would have it that, in presiding

<sup>1</sup> Official report.

over this beautiful festival, Robespierre "really believed that he was inaugurating a new religion."<sup>1</sup> However, M. Aulard is obliged to admit that this was by no means the impression of contemporary observers. He knows that they did not have to wait for the 18th Floréal or the 20th Prairial to celebrate the Supreme Being. He observes, indeed, that the cult of the Supreme Being had been organized at Lunéville by the Jacobins "even before the proclamation of the Cult of Reason,"<sup>2</sup> as if there ever had been an official proclamation of the Cult of Reason! He himself quotes several pieces of evidence establishing the fact that the decree of the 18th Floréal was hailed in the provinces "as the consequence of the ceremony of the 20th Brumaire," that is to say, as the consequence of the Festival of Reason. M. Aulard even admits that "as a matter of fact, a large part of France seemed to be unaware of the religious revolution attempted by Robespierre."<sup>3</sup> A strange religious revolution, which contemporary observers did not notice, but which M. Aulard has been able to discover thanks to the pamphlets of the Thermidorians!

The truth is, that there was no religious revolution at that moment. The religious revolution had taken place in Brumaire, when the priests abdicated. In Floréal, Robespierre's aim was to consolidate this religious revolution which was in process of completion, and in no way to provoke a fresh one. The aim which he set before him is known to us from the speech which he made on the 18th Floréal, which we have just analysed. We also know it from a letter which Robespierre's friend, Payan, national agent for the Commune of Paris, wrote him on the very day after the 18th

<sup>1</sup> *Le Culte de la Raison*, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.



Floréal: "This decree," said Payan, "will rally the wavering and divided patriots in the departments to the same doctrine: it does not create a religion and a priesthood, but proves that the legislators do not desire to snatch from the people the comforting dogma of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul." To rally the divided patriots round a common doctrine and round the Government: such was the original aim which Robespierre set before him; and in this he was merely the organ of the Committee of Public Safety and of the Convention itself. Patriots were divided, or rather, had lost their bearings, owing to the double execution of the Dantonists and Hébertists. It was necessary to put an end to their doubts and hesitations, and provide them with a rallying-point. How? On the one hand, by proving to the more uncompromising of the dechristianizing party that the reign of the priests was over, and well over, and that national festivals, henceforth on an organized basis, were definitively to replace the abolished Catholic services; and, on the other hand, by causing the citizens, who but yesterday were Catholic, to forget their former religion by establishing festivals which would eclipse Catholic ceremonies alike in æsthetic magnificence and moral virtue.

This double aim was perfectly well brought out by Robespierre's friend Payan in an address presented to the Convention in the name of the Commune on the 25th Floréal:

"It is not a religion that you have created; it is a set of simple, eternal principles which the still vivid memory of atheistical superstition has enabled you to recall to men's minds. . . . In vain will ill-nature endeavour to persuade men that

your innocent decree will make the hideous monster of fanaticism emerge from its blood-stained tomb; in his report the legislator who proposed it compared the position of priests with that of kings. According to this idea, which is quite a just one, there will not be a great number of citizens who will desire to be priests nowadays. Show me the man who does not prefer principles as simple and eternal as nature to a mystic, inexplicable cult; a just and beneficent God to the God of the priests.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in the eyes of Payan, a faithful interpreter of Robespierre's thought, the decree of the 18th Floréal had sounded the death-knell of Catholicism. The system of national festivals which he put in its place was not, properly speaking, a religion, for there would be no republican priests to celebrate the tenth-day services. What the Convention was instituting was no more than a political and social morality, but a lofty morality, preserving all the good effects of religion without its vices.

Robespierre might well believe that he had attained the object at which he aimed: namely, the rallying of patriotic Catholics and “philosophic” patriotism in a like adoration of the Republic and of God. Congratulations poured in to the Convention. The correspondence committee, which received addresses, declared that the decree of the 18th Floréal “aroused the universal acclamation of the people.”<sup>2</sup>

The most violent members of the dechristianizing party were not last to join in the applause. Lequinio, who in Brumaire had denied at Roche-

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, *Culte de la Raison*, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> The 14th Prairial (*Moniteur*, XX, 633). Cf. also the 7th Prairial (*Moniteur*, XX, 573).

fort the existence of a future life, now delivered a most feeling eulogy of Robespierre's report at the Jacobins. "Every phrase of it," he said, "has met with applause. We should have liked to applaud it every time that it impressed upon our souls elevated sentiments worthy of liberty." The poet Silvain Maréchal, one of the most convinced atheists who then existed, spoke in high praise of the festival of the 20th Prairial.<sup>1</sup>

If the dechristianizing party were as pleased as this, it was not, as has been insinuated, in order to flatter the dictator; they had serious grounds for satisfaction. The dechristianizing process was going on with renewed vigour. It looked, indeed, as if the allusion to the liberty of worship inserted in the decree of the 18th Floréal had only the force of a principle *ad interim*. It was after the 18th Floréal that "they proceeded to close the greater number of the churches." M. Aulard makes the statement, and we may take his word.<sup>2</sup> "Forced secularization of priests," he repeats, "became in some places much more frequent than in the time of Hébert."<sup>3</sup> M. Aulard adds, it is true, that these churches were closed and these priests deprived of their priesthood, in the teeth of Robespierre's opposition; but, as usual, he does not give the slightest shadow of proof in support of his insinuation. If Robespierre had really been the dictator and pontiff whom M. Aulard describes, he would no doubt have been able to hinder and check the irreparable fall of Catholicism. If he did not do so, it was either because he was not a dictator, or because he did not wish to. We have no reason to doubt the feelings of aversion from priests

<sup>1</sup> In his *Tableau des événements révolutionnaires*, which appeared in the Year III.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire politique de la Révolution*, p. 480.

<sup>3</sup> *Culte de la Raison*, p. 353.

which he expressed so loudly and so often. He was not one of those anti-clericals who will tear the priests limb from limb over a drink, and immediately afterwards avail themselves of their priestly functions. He had not been a practising Catholic since his schooldays, to the great scandal of his clerical professors. Unlike Danton, he cannot be reproached with not having lived in accordance with his principles.

The truth is, that Robespierre blamed useless and harmful violence. The truth is, that he tried to rally Catholics to the Revolution, and to a large extent succeeded. The day after the festival of the 20th Prairial, his friend Payan said before the Commune of Paris : " All citizens were satisfied with the simple and natural worship offered to the Supreme Being. They regretted neither their priests nor their superstitions, they promised to cherish virtue and liberty, they believed they were paying their debt to the Godhead and to their country. The sentiment of fraternity united all hearts. . . ." This union, this reconciliation which Payan remarked in Paris, is proved by other witnesses to have prevailed in the rest of the country. In the pious city of Lyons the festival was celebrated amid general enthusiasm. The same was the case almost everywhere.

Far from having favoured Catholicism, the decree of the 18th Floréal seemed to have dealt it the final blow, and to have completed the work so precipitately begun on 20th Brumaire. Foreigners were in no doubt about it. The royalist pamphleteer, Mallet du Pan, writes in his *Mémoires* : " The festival of the Supreme Being produced an extraordinary effect abroad ; it was really believed that Robespierre would close the abyss of the Revolution." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by E. Hamel, *Histoire de Robespierre*, III, 544.



Alas ! Though Robespierre had succeeded in uniting the majority of Frenchmen in one self-same sentiment of patriotism, this instant was short, and his triumph knew no morrow. Slander, envy, fear and crime were to ruin his work and the very Republic itself.

The corrupt parliamentary envoys whom he had had recalled from their missions in the departments, and whom his inflexible probity threatened or annoyed, saw in the Festival of the Supreme Being a means of casting ridicule upon the law-giver whom they dreaded and hated. They were for the most part just as much deists as Robespierre himself, and when they had overthrown him they took care not to revoke the decree of the 18th Floréal, or repudiate the Supreme Being. Many ended, as was meet, by repenting and becoming zealously religious. But in the meantime they circulated a rumour that Robespierre was merely a Catholic in disguise, that his aim was to reinstate the Constitutional clergy, and use them as an instrument of domination. They called him a "pontiff" among themselves. A few of them, such as Bourdon of Oise and Lecointre, railed against him under their breath at the festival of the 20th Prairial. A few days later the members of the Committee of General Security were setting up the engine of war known as the affair of Catherine Théot, in the hope of compromising Robespierre with a harmless, pious old woman.<sup>1</sup> In short, they set afoot the legend which has been only too successful, since it is repeated nowadays by some who are considered to be accredited historians.

This legend can now be estimated at its true value. I shall be rewarded for my trouble if I

<sup>1</sup> I have examined the affair of Catherine Théot in my *Contributions à l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution*. Alcan, 1906.

have convinced some of my readers that it is time to rehabilitate the statesman who, from the beginning of his political career to the end, had but one passion, a passion for the public weal, and who advanced towards the high ideal which he had set before him with a rectitude of mind and action which command admiration and warm the heart. Robespierre loved the people with a deep and disinterested love—the real people, horny-handed and warm-hearted. He loved it even in its weakness and prejudices. He saw that in order to raise it to the level of the Revolution, and wean it from its superstitions, it was necessary to avoid a direct collision with its mentality, which was the growth of centuries, and to avoid shattering its fundamental beliefs at a single blow. He studied to present it with its necessary emancipation in the form least disturbing to its understanding. He spoke the only language comprehensible to it.

We may think what we like about Robespierre's deism. I do not deny that it may be considered out-of-date and threadbare, but it served as an easy transition between an exclusive and tyrannical Catholicism and freedom of thought. It was a necessary stage. And how unjust it is, too, to blame Robespierre for his deism, without reproaching his opponents with it too, while extending to them, and particularly to Danton, with his dubious motives, an infinite indulgence. One cannot consider it a crime in Robespierre to have been of his age. We ought to give him credit, and great credit, for having always subordinated his religious to his social ideal. He loved God less than the people, and he loved God because he believed Him to be indispensable to the people.

## CHAPTER V

### NEW EVIDENCE ABOUT CATHERINE THÉOT<sup>1</sup>

SOME years ago now, I gave an account of the affair of Catherine Théot.<sup>2</sup> When, on the morrow of the Festival of the Supreme Being, they denounced as a hotbed of conspiracy the harmless meetings presided over by an old visionary, whose spiritual director was the Carthusian Dom Gerle, the Committee of General Security and its spokesman, Vadier, were preparing an engine of war against Robespierre, whom it was their intention to turn to ridicule and discredit by associating him with these fanatics. In his report of the 27th Prairial, Vadier made the best efforts he could to give importance to an affair which had none; he represented old Catherine as a formidable prophetess with many adherents, he glorified her meetings with a ritual and attributed a liturgical character to them. Sénar, the police agent who had been in charge of the organized surveillance with which Catherine had been surrounded since the month of Floréal, had in his turn taken a great deal of trouble to carry out Vadier's wishes. His object was to prove that these visionaries regarded Robespierre as a Messiah. From a comparison of Sénar's story with the records of the examination of the accused parties, and the

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires* for 1919, t. XI, pp. 388-92.

<sup>2</sup> See my book *Contributions à l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution française*, Paris, 1907, pp. 96-142. See also my article on the Divisions in the Committees of Government on the eve of the 9th Thermidor, p. 138 *seq.*

documents bearing upon the case, I had already arrived at the conclusion that the whole affair had been trumped up. But even this fell short of the truth.

I had recently to consult the daily register of the Revolutionary Committee for the Section of the Museum<sup>1</sup> at the Archives; and I found in it a whole mass of veracious testimony which gives us a life-like picture of the old servant whose name has become historic.

On the 29th Prairial, Year II, two days after Vadier's report, one Nicolas Leclerc, who lived in the Maison Estienne, Rue Estienne, burning with patriotism, or spite, came and denounced to the Committee the Delaroche family, who lived on the fourth story of his house, as "being well acquainted with the woman Théos,<sup>2</sup> calling herself a virgin." This family regularly attended the prophetess's meetings, and the informer added that the widow Escoffier and the girl La Picarde did the same.

The denunciation followed its usual course. On the 30th Prairial the Committee examined at length the adepts of Catherine Théot to whom its attention had been drawn. Jean-Baptiste Amable Delaroche, who declared that he was seventy-five years old and a native of Paris, a retired baker living on the charitable relief allowed him by the Republic as the father of defenders of the country, admitted that he had known the woman Théot for three years. But he at once added that it was not till after the arrest of this woman that he learnt that she used to make

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4667. The Section of the Museum, formerly the Section of the Louvre, held its meetings in the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine's name was Théot. It was Sénar, the police agent, who thought it funny to call her Theos (the Greek for God) and Vadier was quick to profit by this witty invention.



people call her the Mother of God. Sénar, who had given her the surname Theos—that is to say, God—was quite capable of having also conferred on her this travesty of motherhood. Delaroche went on to declare that she had been employed for fifteen years by a wholesale pottery merchant on the Quai des Miramiones. “He remarked that she had one hand paralysed, which shook every time she used it.” Catherine’s meetings were held every day, “but sometimes the woman Theos requested the persons who usually came to her to refrain from coming, pointing out to them that assemblies were not approved of, and that it was better to come at long intervals.” These meetings were occupied with nothing but the Word of God, the reading of the Bible and other pious books, besides the predictions which Catherine had formerly made, especially about the destruction of priests and tyrants and the victories of the Republic. Delaroche knew that Catherine had been imprisoned in the Bastille in 1778 or 1779, and that she had said on coming out that “if the Bastille was not destroyed voluntarily it would be by force.” He had heard her say that it was the priests who had had her put into the Bastille “on account of the writings in which she heralded their fall and punishment, saying that they should be scourged with rods of iron.” Catherine also said that “it was God who had permitted the year 1789, that on July 14 of the said year she had started from Sèvres at ten o’clock in the evening, and arrived at midnight in the city of Paris, where she had made various declarations and made a demonstration of her feeling on the subject of the Revolution; and that she had said that the recall of the Petits Suisses who were at the Champ de Mars was due to her.” Delaroche had heard

Catherine say that "kings, queens, great people and priests were tyrants, that they could not last, and would be overthrown as they deserved, and that the poor ought to triumph." He had never seen her show any signs of regret for the Civil Constitution of the Clergy or the closing of the churches. "On the contrary, she had foretold all that; he himself, who had once punctiliously followed the religious usages of the churches, had been enlightened by this woman, who had convinced him of the uselessness of confession and priests, and the adequacy of turning to God oneself to ask remission of one's sins; that for two years past he had followed this woman's advice, had ceased to frequent churches, and had broken himself, as far as he had been able, of whatever faults he might have."

Delaroche also declared that he had twice seen Dom Gerle at the meetings, that "the woman Godefroy<sup>1</sup> wrote to the dictation of the woman Theos all the letters which she addressed, either to priests or others, about her predictions." He remarked that Catherine could neither read nor write. He had also seen at the meetings Doctor Quesvremont de Lamotte, who had already been arrested.

Delaroche affirmed that nobody at the meetings had any special title. "They only called this woman their mother, but when they were concerned with Scripture, he had heard her call herself the second Eve, and say that she was inspired by grace."

They only spoke of the war in the Vendée and the military operations "to applaud and show satisfaction at the victories won by our armies.

<sup>1</sup> The one who, according to Sénar, played the part of "Enlightener" (*éclaircisseur*).

The woman Theos always opposed any mention of public affairs, and exhorted the workmen and all others present to perform their duties as citizens and celebrate the tenth days, and to keep the law. . . ."

Dom Gerle only spoke very rarely. About two years ago he had heard him say to the Bishop of Dordogne "that it was better not to die than to die, and that if Catherine Theos were recognized by the assembly for what she appeared to be<sup>1</sup> there would be an end of corrupt morals, and she would bruise the serpent's head; that we should die no more, and that there would be no more war."

The wife of Delaroche, Barbe-Geneviève Pinard, was examined in her turn. Her husband had taken her to Catherine Théot's house in the Rue des Rosiers, in the Marais. She had been there only three times, the last time being a fortnight or three weeks before her arrest. Their only occupation at these meetings was reading devotional works. She had heard Catherine say "that when she was a servant, she wore an iron girdle with spikes; that however tired she might be, this girdle never hurt her in the least, or made the slightest contusion or mark; that the woman Theos said she had worn this girdle during the time when God inspired her, and had afterwards left it off."

Catherine used to say "that this war would not last much longer; that all kings, including the Pope, would descend from their thrones; that the priests would be overthrown, that there

<sup>1</sup> Dom Gerle and Pontard, the constitutional Bishop of Dordogne, had already tried to make use of the prophetess Suzette Labrousse, a native of Périgord, in the interests of their Church. Catherine seemed to them a fit successor of Suzette, who had set out for Rome in the spring of 1792 in order to convert the Pope.

would no longer be more than one shepherd and one flock."

Marguerite de Prise, widow of the surgeon Jean Escoffier, living upon her income, which consisted of an annuity of 1,800 livres, aged fifty-nine and resident at No. 4, Rue Estienne, gave evidence in her turn. She declared that she had never known Catherine to be called the Mother of God. Citizen Delaroche had once taken her to one of the meetings. She had gone out of curiosity. There had been no question of anything but what the widow Godefroy had read out. This widow had read passages from the Gospel, on which she commented. They had then sung hymns to the glory of God. No forms were observed, except that they "kissed the woman Theos on the cheeks on going in and on coming out." There were only a dozen people at the meeting.

Last was heard Marie-Anne Legendre, known as La Picarde, a washerwoman aged thirty-two, living at No. 7, Rue Boucher. She declared that in 1786, at the time when she was a domestic servant in the house of Garin the lemonade-seller, in the Rue de la Parcheminerie, she frequently saw a poor sick old woman come there and take her meals in the house of the said Garin. She only knew this woman by the name of Catherine. She had never heard her called either Theos or the Mother of God. Before the Revolution Catherine had foretold that tyrants would be overthrown, priests destroyed, the confessionals turned into sentry-boxes, and the king dragged to the scaffold. La Picarde had never been to the meetings, and had not seen her again since the Revolution.

These testimonies, the sincerity of which is obvious, require no comment. The upshot of



them clearly is that Catherine was a visionary ; she placed her visions at the service of the Revolution. The humble people who came to her to sing hymns and listen to pious readings formed neither a sect nor a conspiracy. It required all the ingenuity of Sénar, the police agent, and all the tortuous malice of Vadier, to construct a political accusation out of such poor data. But any arm was good enough to strike at Maximilien Robespierre, whose immense popularity gave offence to his rivals.

## CHAPTER VI

### FOUQUIER-TINVILLE AND ROBESPIERRE.<sup>1</sup>

IGNORANT and prejudiced historians continue to represent Fouquier-Tinville, the celebrated public prosecutor to the Revolutionary Tribunal, as a docile creature of Robespierre's. They are bound to do so, if they are to cast upon Robespierre the responsibility for the butchery during the great Terror.

And yet Fouquier-Tinville defended himself forcibly against the accusation of Robespierrism. He persistently declared that he had only been to Robespierre's house once, on the day of Collot d'Herbois' assassination. This assertion was not contradicted by anybody in the course of the long trial which ended in his condemnation to death. Fouquier did more than this. He claimed that he was secretly hostile to Robespierre, and invoked to this effect both facts and witnesses. "In support of my conduct," he wrote in the first memorandum which he drew up to justify himself, "I observe that, while dining about four months ago<sup>2</sup> at the house of Citizen Le Cointre, deputy, with several others, notably with Citizen Merlin of Thionville, I had a conversation with him which he will doubtless remember, which will prove how much I detested the tyranny of Robespierre."<sup>3</sup> On this point,

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires*, for 1917, pp. 239-43.

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, at the end of Floréal.

<sup>3</sup> Fouquier's first memorandum, in H. Fleischmann, *Réquisitoires de Fouquier-Tinville*, 1911, p. 192. This memorandum was written on the 20th Thermidor, Year II.

again, Fouquier was not contradicted in any way. Now it is known that Lecointre and Merlin of Thionville were among the bitterest enemies of Robespierre.

Fouquier furthermore asserts that about a week before the 9th Thermidor he had a conversation with the deputy Martel, in the course of which he "censured the despotism which Robespierre seemed to exercise over the Committee of Public Safety." Martel, called as a witness at the trial, confirmed this in the following terms: "Before the 9th Thermidor he said to me that we must band ourselves together against the despotism of Robespierre in order to save our heads, and that Robespierre had threatened him if he did not get on with the work more quickly."<sup>1</sup>

Though it is hardly probable that Robespierre, who no longer came to the Committee, and wished to check the Terror, used the expressions which Martel reports in speaking to Fouquier, it is probable, on the other hand, that Fouquier alluded to Robespierre in unfavourable terms.

Fouquier defended himself vigorously against the charge of letting himself be influenced by passion in judging Danton and his friends. He even alleged that the Committees had forced his hand. The Dantonist Vilain d'Aubigny, who was called as a witness, confirmed his declarations, and added that Fouquier had told him at the trial "that he had done all that was in his power to save them."<sup>2</sup> It is true that he reproached him with having done nothing but utter lamentations.

When one knows that Fouquier was related in some degree to Camille Desmoulins, and owed

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire parlementaire*, t. XXXV, pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, t. XXXIV, p. 403.

his appointment partly to him, one understands why he felt some embarrassment in accusing his former patrons.

But in order to prove his opposition to Robespierre, the public prosecutor appealed in particular to his conduct in the affair of Catherine Théot, that first plot aimed at the "Incorruptible" by his enemies on the Committee of General Security.

"Another proof that I have never followed the personal wishes of Robespierre is that when he intimated to me at the Committee of Public Safety, in the name of the Committee, that the affair of Catherine Théos [*sic*] must be postponed; after vainly pointing out to him that the duty of following it up was imposed upon me by the decree, being unable to gain a hearing that day, I withdrew and went to the Committee of General Security, where I reported the rumours and my difficult situation, pointing out three times that he, he, he opposed it in the name of the Committee of Public Safety; 'That is to say, Robespierre,' answered a member whom I believe to have been Citizen Amar or Citizen Vadier; to which I answered, Yes. (All the members of the Committee were present, with the exception of David, Jagot and Panis.) I may point out that among my sealed-up papers there has also been found an abstract of the affair of Catherine Théos, which proves that I was engaged on it. I furthermore point out that I sent in a fresh abstract of this affair with the note: 'This affair is a regular counter-revolution, especially in respect of the documents emanating from Dom Gerle and Lamothe, the doctor.' This abstract must be among the documents in the hands of Citizen Vadier. Now I appeal to any impartial



being : if I had been a partisan of Robespierre and his principles should I, about three weeks before the 9th Thermidor, have denounced his conduct and his despotism, at a time when nobody durst raise his voice on the subject of this individual, and at a time when he possessed the wily and dangerous art of making his opinions prevail in the Convention, the Committee of Public Safety and the Jacobin Society ? ”<sup>1</sup>

The witness Monnet, usher to the Tribunal, who gave evidence at the trial, confirmed Fouquier's assertions. According to him, the warrants were already drawn up for bringing Catherine Théot and her accomplices before the Tribunal, when Fouquier, on his return from the Committee, came and notified him that the affair would not be proceeded with.<sup>2</sup> Fouquier added specific details to what the witness remembered : “ I was summoned on this business before the Committee of Public Safety at one o'clock in the morning. Robespierre was there : there was a very sharp dispute among the members of the Committees ; they did not want her to be brought to judgment ; it was this, I believe, which gave rise to the division between the members of the Committees, and brought about the events of the 9th Thermidor. I was asked for the documents about this affair, in order that they might draw up a second report.”

We know from one of the accused persons, Quesvremont, known as Lamothe, that this event took place on the 8th Messidor. “ I had been marked down on Fouquier's list to die on the 9th Messidor, and on the evening of the 8th his minions came to fetch me and transfer me to the Conciergerie ; I was at Le Plessis, where I still

<sup>1</sup> Second memorandum in Fleischmann, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Buchez and Roux, t. XXXV, p. 181.

am, when at ten o'clock in the evening, just as I was going to bed, a gaoler opened my door, and said: 'Lamothe, pack your things for the Conciergerie.' But at the end of an hour they came and told me I could go to bed, and that I should not go till the next day."<sup>1</sup>

So far we have heard nothing about the relations between Fouquier and Robespierre save the testimony hostile to Robespierre. A lucky find at the Archives revealed to us the following letter, an autograph draft written by Herman, formerly president of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and a member, at the time, of the Board for regulating civil administration, police and tribunals.

"I believe you to be a good and enlightened patriot," wrote Herman to Desvieux, President of the Tribunal of the third arrondissement; "I am applying to you to ask you, in the light of your republican conscience, to suggest to me a citizen fit to perform the functions of public prosecutor, for the Committee of Public Safety has charged me to find one. Prompt reply, please.

"Fraternal salutations."<sup>2</sup>

A superscription in Herman's hand runs: "Sent on the 9th Messidor, Year II."

This letter is very interesting. It proves that at the very moment when Fouquier was trying to bring Catherine Théot before the Revolutionary Tribunal, Robespierre, desirous of parrying the blow which Vadier was trying to deal him, was so distrustful of Fouquier that he had asked the

<sup>1</sup> I published this extract from the petition sent by Lamothe to the Convention after Thermidor in my essay on the affair of Catherine Théot (*Contributions à l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution*, p. 140).

<sup>2</sup> *Archives nationales*, BB. 3022.

Committee of Public Safety to remove him. Herman would not have looked for a successor if he had not had orders to do so. Since Fouquier finally kept his place, there must have been a counter-order.

I have already noted, in my recent essay on the *Divisions in the Committees of Government on the Eve of the 9th Thermidor*,<sup>1</sup> that violent scenes took place at the Committee of Public Safety on the 11th Messidor. It was probably on that day that the counter-order was given. On the 8th Messidor Robespierre carried his point, for Catherine Théot was not brought to judgment. On the 11th he was beaten, in spite of the succour brought him by Saint-Just, who had returned from the army that morning.

We may now grasp the full force of Fouquier's remarks on these incidents, which, according to him, were the occasion of the irreparable dissensions in the Committees, and led to the 9th Thermidor. We also understand why Fouquier did not hesitate, on the 10th Thermidor, to demand that Robespierre and his friends should be outlawed. We can understand that during the period immediately preceding that great day, Fouquier had received frequent visits from Amar, Vadier, Vouland and Jagot—that is to say, from Robespierre's bitterest enemies. E. Hamel wonders whether Fouquier was in the plot.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Barère proposed to maintain him in his post of public prosecutor at the session of the 11th Thermidor seemed to him a serious presumption in favour of this supposition. Herman's letter, published above, adds peculiar weight to this supposition of Robespierre's historian.

In any case, the facts and documents cited prove, as clearly as can be, that there are ab-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 138 *seq.* <sup>2</sup> *Histoire de Robespierre*, 1867, t. III, p. 612.

solutely no grounds for regarding Fouquier-Tinville as a creature and instrument of the "Incorruptible."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This essay brought me a letter from M. Alphonse Dunoyer, the learned author of a biography of Fouquier-Tinville which appeared in 1913: "I am entirely of your opinion," writes M. Dunoyer, "as to the fact that Fouquier cannot on any grounds be considered to have been a creature and instrument of Robespierre." M. Dunoyer further points out that Fouquier denounced Dumas as an accomplice of Robespierre. Now Dumas, who presided over the Revolutionary Tribunal, was detested by Fouquier. Finally, he quotes the following characteristic passage from the examination which Fouquier underwent on the 1st Frimaire, Year III, before the judge Pierre Forestier: "I declare that I had no private connections with the Robespierres, Saint-Just, Couthon and Le Bas; that I never saw them except at the Committees of Public Safety and General Security, as members of these Committees; that I have never been to the house of any of them, except on one occasion to the house of the elder Robespierre, on the day of the assassination of Collot d'Herbois, when I had called on Collot and found him out: *the despotic tone with which Robespierre received me would have put me off for good if I had ever had any desire to go there.*"



## CHAPTER VII

### HERMAN AND HIS BROTHER

AMONG the Robespierrists, who included so many honourable men devoted to duty and with a passionate attachment to the public weal, the figure of Herman shines out with particular brightness.

He was the son of the Registrar of the Estates of Artois, and had known Robespierre in their early days. They were of the same age. Both of them were lawyers. Herman sat in court as deputy for the Advocate-General of the Provincial Council of Artois. Robespierre pleaded at the bar as a barrister.

While Robespierre was becoming famous in the Constituent Assembly and at the Jacobins, Herman remained at Arras, where he upheld the revolutionary cause with warmth and conviction. Before 1789 he had already acquired "a reputation for probity which the Revolution could not impair" (*Dictionnaire de Leipzig*, 1807). He became successively a judge of the district tribunal of Saint-Pol, then of the district of Arras, and then of the criminal tribunal of Pas de Calais. It was there that he was sought out by Robespierre's affection and confidence, and summoned to Paris, to preside over the Revolutionary Tribunal, where he succeeded Montané on August 28, 1793. In this capacity he conducted the great political trials of the period, those of Marie-Antoinette, the Girondins, the Duke of Orleans, Barnave and the Dantonists. In April 1794

he became Minister of the Interior, and shortly afterwards, on the suppression of the ministries, Commissary for civil administration, police and tribunals.

“ In order to judge a man rightly,” said Herman himself in the memorandum which he presented to the Convention when he was arrested after Thermidor,<sup>1</sup> “ one must also see him in undress ”—that is to say, in his everyday life.

The rough notes of his lists of official business from day to day, which are preserved at the National Archives,<sup>2</sup> contain documents which do him the greatest honour. As we turn them over, we understand better the secret of the immense moral prestige which the Robespierrists enjoyed among the men of the early generations of the Republic. These democrats regarded public office as a duty to be fulfilled with scrupulous honesty. They had a horror of being suspected of personal motives. They closed their hearts to every suggestion foreign to the public weal, to those of friendship or even of family. If they had an appointment to make, or a position to bestow, their sole anxiety was as to the merit and claims of the applicant. “ Influence ” had no power over them. Ah ! how fine the Republic was in the Year II !

Herman had several brothers. “ Before the organization of the executive commissions,” he said, “ one of them was given a post, not by me, in the Food Commission. I thought he would be more in the right place at the Board for the despatch of laws ; the members of this Board, who did not yet know me, wished to make him

<sup>1</sup> This most interesting memorandum was published by Cam-pardon in his *Histoire du tribunal révolutionnaire*, t. II, pp. 332-45.

<sup>2</sup> BB. 3022.

head of a section ; I was forced to write to them that I knew no interests save those of the Republic, and that I insisted that my brother should have no better place.”<sup>1</sup> Herman speaks the truth. I have found in the National Archives the letter which he wrote three days after taking up office at the Board for regulating civil administration, to request the law office not to appoint his brother head of a section. The letter is an autograph draft, and runs as follows :

TO THE LAW OFFICE,  
*Sent the 18th Germinal, Year II.*

“It has been reported to me that you contemplated placing my brother at the head of a section. When I employed him, because he is a patriot and in some respects capable, I might have made him a head if I had recognized the necessary qualities in him. I doubt whether he has acquired them sufficiently since that time.

I hope that it is not because he is my brother that you will employ him in such and such a post.

You and I alike should know no interest save the public weal. I insist, then, that for the present he should only be employed as second in command.

Fraternal greetings.”<sup>2</sup>

An old soldier was appointed in place of Herman’s brother. Herman had found him as chief assistant clerk in the Department of the Interior, and judged him to be “active, upright and patriotic.” He had preferred him to his brother.

Herman’s brother was not altogether pleased at being ousted at his brother’s behest from the

<sup>1</sup> Campardon, II, p. 542. This brother’s Christian name was Amé.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives nationales*, BB. 3022.

place which had been offered him. A few weeks later he thought he might be able to make up for it by asking for compensation. He wrote to Herman asking if he might be attached to the recently created Board for the despatch of laws. But this time again he was frustrated, and brought upon himself the following long reprimand.

AMÉ HERMAN,

*Law Office. Sent on the 9th Prairial, Year II.*

“MY DEAR BROTHER,

I was quite aware that you were at the law office, in case I had thought I ought to summon you here to the despatch section which is going to be set up. You speak in your letter of the ‘way of nature.’ If by that you mean the natural bonds which draw us close to each other, and if you think that they are a reason in my eyes for giving you such a position, you have not got much idea of public affairs, and know me very little. You should know that a civil servant has neither relations nor friends. He sees nothing but the public weal. From this point of view, I do not think you capable of managing a section for the despatch of laws, in which there is so much responsibility, and where a mathematical accuracy and precision are required. You talk of mere supervision. That is not enough; you require method, you require a whole equipment of minute, detailed information which nothing but quite long practice can give; that is why, in spite of the representations of the members of the office who would like to keep Viret, I shall send for him here. There is no more difficult department than that for responsibility. It is to this matter that I daily draw the attention of the Committee of Public Safety; and if any inaccuracy occurred in the execution of the work,



since the head of the section would be held responsible in the first place, I should not like, if I were asked who the head is, to have to say that it was my brother. I have already departed from my principles, and that on Lanne's representations,<sup>1</sup> by giving you a post attached to the department entrusted to me; for though public considerations may make it my duty to remove such persons, it must not be possible for people to say, even as a pretext, that it is in order to find places for one's relations and friends. Many people have written to me, and I shall not listen to their requests. One should know one's level, and above all, one should not let one's happiness depend upon a small increase of salary. There are many with whom I would gladly change places, though they do not know it.

Fraternal greetings."<sup>2</sup>

There is something cheering in reading such a letter as this. As one reads it, one gains a better understanding of what the Republic meant to those Robespierrists who were its heart and soul, and of what they thought it ought to be. "You should know that a civil servant has neither relations nor friends." "One should not let one's happiness depend upon a small increase of salary"! These phrases, of a truly Roman cast, welled up from the heart. Would that they might be graven on the minds of all our future civil servants! But what a fine subject to develop at school in our courses of civic and moral education!

<sup>1</sup> Herman's assistant at the Board for regulating civil administration, police and tribunals.

<sup>2</sup> BB. 3022.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DIVISIONS IN THE COMMITTEES OF GOVERNMENT ON THE EVE OF THE 9TH THERMIDOR.

*Based on some unpublished documents*<sup>1</sup>

THE crisis which came to a head on the 9th Thermidor was caused by a clash of personalities even more than by conflicting programmes and parties. It only seems so obscure because the chief persons involved in it were prompted by private enmity, and therefore would not or could not tell the whole truth. The recriminations which were bandied about at the Jacobins or the Convention have something veiled and incomplete about them. One feels them to be full of reserves and hidden implications. The members deal one another terrible blows, but the hits are mutual. In public, they are acting a part. They conceal the true reasons of their disunion. They are only entirely sincere in the privacy of the committees. There they abuse and threaten one another, but abuse and threats leave no immediate traces. When they finally make up their minds to speak plainly, it is not till after the event, for purposes of self-defence ; this being so, their belated admissions inspire us with mistrust.

It is therefore a piece of good fortune to lay one's hand upon some strictly contemporary documents which enable us to grasp in the very act, and at the very moment, the subterranean activities of the antagonists at grips with one

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Revue historique* (1915, t. CXVIII).

another. It is an interest of this sort which seems to be afforded by those we are about to place before our readers, setting them in the right order and the right light.

All witnesses are agreed in informing us that the first serious and persistent dissensions began to make themselves felt in the Committees after the famous decree of the 18th Floréal, by which Robespierre had caused the solemn recognition of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. The Committee of General Security, which was made up of a large majority of out-and-out "dechristianizers," affected to regard Robespierre as a secret protector of Catholicism. Vadier and Amar attracted particular attention by the violence of their opposition. The former was profoundly anti-clerical. The second had grievances of another sort against Robespierre. He had been entrusted with reporting upon the Chabot affair, but would only treat it as a piece of speculation, and his whole endeavours had been turned towards the falsification of the decree liquidating the India Company.<sup>1</sup> Robespierre had censured him in no measured terms for neglecting the political side of the affair, the "foreign con-

<sup>1</sup> The India Company scandal, which hangs over all the great political trials of the Terror, had been provoked as early as November 1793 by a denunciation brought by the deputy Chabot, who was himself involved in it. Chabot asserted that the fraudulent liquidation of the Company, which had been procured by a falsified decree, really concealed a political manœuvre on the part of enemy agents. He maintained that these agents, under the direction of the royalist Baron de Batz, had intended, not only to make money by speculating in the stocks of the company in liquidation, but further, to denounce those members of the Convention whom they had bribed, and so to discredit the Convention as a whole, to excite the people against it, and so lead to its dissolution. Robespierre had accused Amar of omitting to mention in his report this royalist manœuvre denounced by Chabot. (See my book, *L'Affaire de la Compagnie des Indes*.)

spiracy " denounced by Chabot and Basire. Lasting bad feeling had arisen from this. The report on the Dantonists had been taken from the Committee of General Security and entrusted to Saint-Just. The Committee was offended at seeing itself relegated to the background. It was even more offended when it saw itself prevented from examining into the reorganization of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The famous law of the 22nd Prairial was brought forward in the name of the Committee of Public Safety by Couthon, aided by Robespierre's advice. Grievances due to wounded self-esteem cannot be pardoned.

The religious question offered the Committee of General Security an opportunity for revenge. At the very moment when the Festival of the Supreme Being was being celebrated with imposing pomp, Vadier was putting the final touches to a great report which he read to the Convention seven days later, on the 27th Prairial. In it he denounced a fresh conspiracy of " fanatics," that of Catherine Théot, the " Mother of God," a poor old visionary who in her cramped lodging in the Rue Contrescarpe prophesied to others as unfortunate as herself a speedy end of their miseries, and the coming of a Messiah who should regenerate the whole earth. The affair of Catherine Théot had as its object not only to cast ridicule upon the religious idea, and to hinder the reconciliation which Robespierre had thought he was effecting by the Festival of the Supreme Being ; but it was a blow aimed indirectly against the person of the new " pontiff " himself. Vadier knew, in fact, that the Carthusian Dom Gerle, a former member of the Constituent Assembly, visited the Mother of God, and that Dom Gerle had obtained a certificate of civism from Robespierre. Dom Gerle had been arrested. The en-



quiry would bring his relations with Robespierre to light. The police agents who had had Catherine Théot's meetings under observation since the month of Floréal attributed remarks to her in their reports to the effect that Robespierre was the Messiah whose advent she foretold. They were even alleged to have found in the mattress of this poor old woman, who could not write, a letter said to have been addressed by her to Robespierre, "her chief prophet," "her beloved minister," congratulating him upon the honour which he was showing to the Supreme Being. Of course, Vadier said nothing about all this in his report of the 27th Prairial. He kept these revelations in reserve. He was to bring them out at the great session of the 9th Thermidor. "Under the Mother of God's mattress," he then said, "was a letter addressed to Robespierre. This letter announced to him that his mission was foretold by Ezekiel, and that to him was due the restoration of religion, which he was ridding of the priests."<sup>1</sup> Catherine's letter is no longer in existence in the Archives, and perhaps it never existed except in the imagination of Vadier or his police agents. But we should note his intention of aiming at Robespierre through the old visionary.

There was yet another way of approach, by which Vadier hoped to implicate Robespierre in the "conspiracy of fanatics." At Choisy-le-Roi there was a brother-in-law of Duplay, the carpenter of the Faubourg St.-Honoré, in whose house Robespierre had his lodging. Now this brother-in-law, a certain Vaugeois, mayor of his commune, received Maximilien at his table fairly often. He had a sister, and this sister had been

<sup>1</sup> Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution*, t. XXXIV, p. 31.

in touch with Catherine Théot : so in this direction, too, Robespierre was vulnerable.

After the 9th Thermidor the victors did not fail to have the connection verified between Robespierre and the Vaugeois family, on the one hand, and between the Vaugeois family and Catherine Théot, on the other. This is revealed by the following curious police report.

*The 12th day of Thermidor, Year II of the French Republic one and indivisible.*

“ The undersigned, Jean-Baptiste Blache, principal agent of the Committee of General Security of the National Convention, having with me Citizens Louis-Daniel Bertrand and Léonard Rousselet, members of the Revolutionary Committee of the commune of Choisi-sur-Seine :

In view of the results of the denunciation made to us, the said agent, on the morning of to-day, by the said members of the Revolutionary Committee and the municipal officers of the said Choisi, we repaired to the house of the woman called Marie-Louise Vaugeois, widow of Guillaume-Jean Duchange, formerly wet-nurse of the Duke of Aquitaine, resident at Choisi-sur-Seine, Boulevard des Sans-Culottes, where being present, in the name of the law and in virtue of the powers given to me by the Committee of General Security, I notified her of the seizure of her person, and, in fact, having had her taken to the inn of one Guenin, after leaving two members of the said Revolutionary Committee of the said Choisi, to make a search for papers which might be found in her house and that of other suspects, we proceeded to examine her as follows :

*Question :* Is she the sister of one Vaugeois, ex-mayor of Choisi, now under arrest ?

*Answer :* Yes.

*Question* : Is she aware that the said Vaugeois had meetings, correspondence and other private dealings with the persons by name Robespierre the elder, Robespierre the younger, Le Bas, Saint-Just, Henriot, his aides-de-camp, Dumas, ex-president of the Revolutionary Committee [*sic*], and formerly with Lacroix and Danton,<sup>1</sup> and if she herself has not had meetings with the above-mentioned ?

*Answer* : That she had no acquaintance among those mentioned in the above question.

*Question* : Whether a woman called the *Mother of God* had not lived in her house at different times, and at what period ?

*Answer* : That she had come to her house two or three times, but she did not remember when.

*Question* : Whether she had not had her fortune told on the cards, and her horoscope cast by the so-called Mother of God, as well as her brother Vaugeois and his family ?

*Answer* : No.

On it being represented to her that she was hiding the truth, and that the above-mentioned facts were proved against her,

She replied that these answers contained the truth.

*Question* : Through what channels she had got to know the alleged Mother of God, and whether she had known one Dom Gerle, ex-Carthusian and ex-deputy in the Legislative Assembly [*sic*] ?

*Answer* : That it was a woman named Godefroy, resident in Paris, Rue des Rosiers, in the Marais, a trimming-maker by profession, who brought her the Mother of God for the first time ;

<sup>1</sup> For these facts see the last pages of my essay *L'Histoire secrète du Comité de Salut public*, in the second series of *Études robespierristes*.

that the company consisted of the woman Gondouin, resident in Paris, Rue de Verderet, near the fish-market, whose husband was formerly a gardener; that as for Dom Gerle, she got to know him at the house of her brother Vaugeois.<sup>1</sup>

This document would suffice to reveal, if necessary, what lay beneath the surface of the affair of Catherine Théot. Already, at the festival of the 20th Prairial, Robespierre had been subjected to the mockery and threats of several of his colleagues, Bourdon of Oise among others. On hearing Vadier's report of the 27th Prairial he felt that an intrigue was being hatched in secret: "The first attempt made by these evilly-disposed persons," he said on the 8th Thermidor, "was to try and degrade the great principles which you had proclaimed, and to efface the touching memory of the national festival [of the 20th Prairial]. Such was the object of the character and solemnity given to what was called the affair of Catherine Théot. Malignity has cleverly managed to take advantage of the political conspiracy hidden beneath the names of a few foolish old pious women." Did Robespierre realise at once that Vadier was aiming not only at his policy, but at his person? Perhaps; for he opposed the trial of the Mother of God with all his might. On the 8th Messidor, after a very sharp discussion, the Committee of Public Safety decided that Catherine Théot should not be brought before the revolutionary tribunal. This decision, which was in open contradiction with the decree passed by the Convention on the 27th Prairial, was the last victory which Robespierre won at the Committee. It could not fail

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 79, Papers of the public prosecutor's office (*Parquet du tribunal révolutionnaire*).



to provide his enemies with yet another pretext for accusing him of dictatorship.

From the beginning of Messidor<sup>1</sup> there had been war to the knife at the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud, Collot d'Herbois and Carnot had taken the offensive against Robespierre, supported by Couthon and soon by Saint-Just, who returned from his mission on the night of the 10th-11th Messidor, just after Fleurus (8th Messidor). Prieur of Côte-d'Or at once took sides with Carnot, his fellow-provincial.<sup>2</sup> Barère and Robert Lindet manœuvred between the two groups, sometimes trying to reconcile them. Prieur of Marne was on mission at Brest, Jeanbon Saint-André at Toulon. Their absence weakened the Robespierrist party, and was perhaps the indirect cause of his fall.

Billaud, who could not forgive Robespierre his hesitation in deserting Danton, took offence at the law of the 22nd Prairial, and reproached Robespierre and Couthon for having it passed without previously submitting it to the examination of the Committee of Public Safety.<sup>3</sup> He himself tells us that, before joining action, he had had a conference with the Committee of General Security: "After the law of the 22nd Prairial, the Committee of General Security summoned me to meet it and concert means of checking the tyrant in his course of dictatorship."<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> And even earlier; see the following essay.

<sup>2</sup> "Prieur of Côte-d'Or was the only one with whom Carnot was in full agreement" (*Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils*. Charavay, 1893, p. 523). Carnot was a native of Côte-d'Or, like Prieur.

<sup>3</sup> *Réponse de Barère, Billaud, etc., à Lecointre*, (Answer of Barère etc., to Lecointre) in *La Révolution française*, t. XXXIV, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> *Mémoire inédit de Billaud-Varenne sur les événements du 9 Thermidor* (Unpublished memorandum of Billaud-Varenne on the events of the 9th Thermidor). Paris 1910, Alexandre Mûre, p. 39.

was the moment at which Vadier was preparing the report upon Catherine Théot.

Collot d'Herbois, who had protected the Hébertists for a long time, and felt a sense of common interest with Fouché, with whom he had "improvised the thunderbolt which fell upon the counter-revolutionaries of Lyons in the plain of Brotteaux," was bound to feel himself to be in danger when he saw Robespierre violently attacking his accomplice Fouché.<sup>1</sup> Billaud had no difficulty in carrying him with him.

As for Carnot, he could not forgive Robespierre for having taken Saint-Just's part against him on two recent occasions. At the beginning of Floréal Saint-Just had protested against the arrest of an agent for powder and saltpetre whom Carnot had had imprisoned in the Luxembourg.<sup>2</sup> Carnot had lost his temper, and threats had been exchanged. Saint-Just appears to have declared to Carnot that he knew of his connections with the aristocrats and would have him guillotined. Carnot seems to have defied him, and turning to Saint-Just and Robespierre, to have shouted, "You are ridiculous dictators." The Committee supported Carnot. The other incident was more serious, and arose on the occasion of Saint-Just's second mission to the Army of the North. On the 30th Prairial, after the capture of Ypres, Carnot, without consulting Saint-Just, who was before Charleroi, had given orders to the Army

<sup>1</sup> See the session of the Jacobins on the 23rd Prairial. Robespierre had reproached Fouché with not denouncing the doings of Chaumette at Nevers, and had given it to be understood that he was intriguing against the Committee of Public Safety. "One who was once the accomplice of Danton now vomits imprecations against him. There are others who seem all on fire to defend the Committee of Public Safety, but are sharpening the dagger against it" (*Moniteur*).

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils*, t. I, p. 532 seq. and *Réponse de Barère, Billaud, etc.*, p. 77, note.

of the North to demand reinforcements of 15,000 infantry and 1,500 cavalry from the Army of the Moselle. A few days after the victory of Fleurus, which took place on the 8th Messidor, Pichegru wrote to Jourdan asking for these reinforcements, and sending him Carnot's letter. Jourdan, supported by the representative Gillet, declared that he required the troops himself. Gillet protested to the Committee of Public Safety in two letters dated the 14th and 15th Messidor. He furthermore applied to Saint-Just in person, asking him to have the unfortunate order given by Carnot revoked. The order was revoked, but there were violent explanations at the Committee. Saint-Just referred to the measure recommended by Carnot as inept.<sup>1</sup>

This scene was not the only one. It was preceded by another, which took place immediately before the return of Saint-Just, doubtless on the 11th Messidor. Levasseur of Sarthe afterwards described it to the Convention at the great session on the 13th Fructidor, at which Lecointre's accusations against the former members of the Committees of Government were discussed; but Levasseur dated it a day too early: "On the 10th Messidor," he said, "I was at the Committee of Public Safety. I was witness of the fact that those who are accused to-day (i.e. Billaud, Collot, etc., the seven members denounced by Lecointre) called Robespierre a dictator. Robespierre flew into a rage beyond belief. The other members of the Committee looked at him contemptuously. Saint-Just went out with him."<sup>2</sup> What was the cause of the quarrel? Was it to do with the adjournment of the trial

<sup>1</sup> See Saint-Just's speech on the 9th Thermidor.

<sup>2</sup> *Moniteur*. Since Saint-Just went out with Robespierre the scene cannot have happened on the 10th Messidor.

of the Mother of God, or was it in connection with the law of the 22nd Prairial that Robespierre was called a dictator? According to Barère, the two Committees in joint session "summoned Robespierre and Saint-Just before them in order to force them to revoke this law (of the 22nd Prairial) of their own accord, since it had been the result of an arrangement unknown to the other members of the Government. This session was very stormy. Among the members of the Committee of General Security, it was Vadier and Moïse Bayle who attacked the law and those responsible for it with the greatest violence and indignation. As for the Committee of Public Safety, it declared that it had had no part in it, and disavowed it completely. Everybody was agreed that it must be revoked on the very next day; and it was after this decision that Robespierre and Saint-Just declared that they would appeal to public opinion; that they saw quite well there was a party formed to ensure that the enemies of the people should go unpunished, and so to ruin the most ardent friends of liberty; but that they would be well able to caution good citizens against the manœuvres contrived by the two Committees of Government. They retired uttering threats against the members of the Committee. Carnot, among others, was called an aristocrat by Saint-Just and threatened with denunciation to the Assembly. It was tantamount to a declaration of war between the two Committees and the triumvirate."<sup>1</sup>

It looks very much as if the scene described by Barère was the same as the one alluded to by Levasseur at the session of the 13th Fructidor. It was immediately after this that Robespierre ceased to take part in the deliberations of the

<sup>1</sup> Barère, *Mémoires*, t. II, p. 205.



Committee of Public Safety. It is impossible not to recognize in his speech at the Jacobins of the 13th Messidor a very direct echo of the accusations which had been levelled against him at the meeting of the Committees of Government. He complained of the attempt to revive the faction of the "indulgents," and "to shield the aristocracy from the justice of the nation"; in other words, to revoke the law of Prairial. He alluded to the persecutions which were being showered upon him: "It has no doubt already been noticed that a certain patriot who desires to avenge and consolidate liberty is constantly hindered in his operations by slanders, representing him in the eyes of the people as a formidable and dangerous man." He added more specifically that they thought themselves strong enough to "slander the Revolutionary Tribunal and the decree of the Convention concerning its organization. They even go so far as to cast doubts upon its legitimacy. . . . They have dared to put it about in the Convention that the Revolutionary Tribunal had only been organized in order to slaughter the Convention itself. Unfortunately this idea had won too much credit." Then Robespierre turned to consider his own case: "In London, I am denounced to the French Army as a dictator; the same slanders have been repeated in Paris. *You would shudder if I were to tell you where.* In London they caricature me, and represent me as a murderer of honourable men, and libels printed in presses provided by the nation itself represent me under the same guise. In Paris they say that it was I who organized the Revolutionary Tribunal, and that this Tribunal was organized to butcher patriots and members of the Convention; I am represented as a tyrant and oppressor of the

national representatives. . . . Courageous defenders of the country are attacked, as they were in the days of Brissot, but I had rather the time when I was denounced by Louvet than the present, so far as my personal satisfaction is concerned ; the enemies of patriots were less treacherous and abominable then than now." In conclusion, Robespierre considered the alternative of being forced to send in his resignation to the Committee of Public Safety : " If I were compelled to give up part of the functions entrusted to my care, I should still retain that of representative of the people, and I should make war to the knife on tyrants and conspirators." <sup>1</sup> When we compare this speech with Barère's *Mémoires*, it is impossible not to suppose that it was a direct echo of the scene which they describe, and which took place before the two Committees of Government. This scene was merely a continuation of others. Billaud said on the 13th Fructidor that on the 23rd Prairial there had been " such a stormy scene " at the Committee of Public Safety, " that Robespierre wept with rage ; that since then he had only been to the Committee of Public Safety twice ; and that in order that the people should not witness the storms that were agitating us, it was agreed that the Committee of Public Safety should hold its sessions a storey higher."

In order to strike at Robespierre the more easily, did the conspirators desire to isolate him from his faithful Couthon ? Probably ; for on the 15th Messidor an order of the Committee of Public Safety sent Couthon as its delegate on mission to the Army of the South. Couthon did

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Journal de la Montagne*. There is no reason for putting back the date of this speech, as M. Aulard has done, to the 9th Messidor.

not go. A new order, complementary to the first, entrusted him on the 19th Messidor with a mission to La Rochelle and Bordeaux. Again Couthon did not go.

About this date, in the middle of Messidor, the dissensions which prevailed in the Committees had become known outside. A faithful adherent of Robespierre's, the Jacobin Deschamps, "aide-de-Camp to the armed force of Paris," charged with a mission to Boulogne-sur-Mer,<sup>1</sup> confided his hopes and fears to the national agent in this town. A few days later Quignon, the national agent, related the confidences which had been made to him in a letter which he sent to Barère by his relative, Hector, who was then on mission in the North. Here is the letter, which has at least the interest of telling us what was thought about the crisis in circles most loyal to Robespierre :

*The National Agent for the district of Boulogne  
to the Committee of Public Safety*

"CITIZEN REPRESENTATIVES,

It is my duty to send you word of everything concerning the public security. A phrase, a word dropped in conversation, if it has any bearing on the general interests, should be carefully gathered up. I was waiting for a favourable opportunity of communicating to you a conversation which I had with two persons. I will enter into great detail, for you ought to be placed in a position to judge of the effect which may be produced by the conduct of certain commissaries, who go about the departments provided either

<sup>1</sup> An order of the Committee of Public Safety, dated the 1st Messidor, had previously charged him to betake himself to Rouen, "there to arrest Charles Fourguet and his sister . . . and remove them to Paris well guarded." The order is signed "Robespierre, Couthon and Barère."

with open or secret powers ; for it is sometimes thoughtless, to say the least of it. I will come to the point.

On the fifteenth of this month, Messidor, two commissaries appeared at my office about ten o'clock in the morning. They each produced a commission empowering them to purchase ten or twelve thousand pairs of thread socks in this district for the students of the École de Mars. Their names are Pillon and Deschamps. I took their commission to the registry of the office, and went out with them to collect information in the commune as to the object of their mission. We found a citizen who undertook to put them in the way of profiting by the resources of the locality. I left them, begging them not to mind troubling me when they needed my good offices. I forgot to say that, while going to and fro, our conversation had turned upon the action of the enemies of the common weal in spreading reports about the armies [at that time the Army of the North had just carried off several victories], and Deschamps kept asking me whether ill-intentioned persons were not persistently exaggerating the effect of the good news announced by the National Convention. We also talked of the fanaticism prevalent in the district of Bergues, where what used to be Sunday was still being celebrated by processions and solemn masses. (This had been reported to me by Citizen Robin-gam, commissary for supplies to the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, employed by Citizen Laurent, representative of the people.) All Deschamps' answers were in a perfectly revolutionary spirit and tended to the public weal. We parted, after exchanging a few words about the influx of strangers from the departments of the Gironde, Corrèze, Dordogne and Calvados, who had taken



up their residence in Boulogne. Deschamps said that the patriots must have suffered greatly then at being unable to drive them out on the spot. This was true. The Convention knew it at the time, and this is what has contributed towards giving this commune a bad reputation, which the mass of the people did not deserve.

In the evening, about nine o'clock, I was at a friend's house, when I was summoned to give the two citizens in question the commissions which they had left at the registry. I went up to the district, and went at once to find them at the inn, and I handed them the commissions. They sat down to table; conversation turned upon the faction of Hébert, Danton, Ronsin, etc. Deschamps at once spoke to me with the fullest confidence; he assured me that Hébert and the rest might indeed be guillotined, but that that party was again trying to raise its head; that the Committees of Public Safety and General Security were quite able to deal with it, but that the moment to strike had not yet come; that patriots of the right stamp groaned to see knaves aping patriotism only to stifle it when they found a favourable opportunity, without considering the good of the Republic, but in order to satisfy private grudges. So far, you will no doubt see nothing but the language of a man loving his country; but you will see what the upshot of it was. The Jacobins were mentioned. I told him that this Society was always straight in its dealings, that it was there that Couthon, Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois went and spoke with the greatest confidence against those desirous of attacking the conduct of the members of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security, whether by toadying and idolizing them, or by slandering them, in order to hinder the salutary

effects of the revolutionary government. 'Oh!' said Deschamps, 'do not imagine that they are all staunch patriots in the Jacobin Society; more than one of them are insignificant creatures, mere readers of the newspapers, men but little able to stand the clash of factions at a critical moment.' I observed that for some time past the public papers had mentioned the election of several members by the society, but that it did not seem as if they had debated for a long time past. Deschamps told me that this was on purpose, and he knew the reason. I replied that, being at a distance from what was going on, we could not always see as clearly as those in Paris; besides, we were sure that the Jacobins would uphold the Convention as a rallying-point, as well as the Committees of Public Safety and General Security. Note that Pillon, Deschamps' colleague, had said nothing but Yes and No. All of a sudden I heard the latter pronounce a pompous eulogy on Robespierre, saying that this representative was unfortunate, and that the Committee had an enemy in its very bosom. I was dumbfounded. I could not help saying to him that this talk seemed to me to be indiscreet, that he ought to be careful how he spoke like that, that such remarks might endanger the public weal if made to persons of whose patriotism he was not sure. Deschamps answered that he knew me, that it did not take him long to judge a man, that he saw quite well that I was to be trusted. I then requested him to name this member of the Committee to me. 'Well,' he said, 'it is Carnot. Yes, Carnot. He is an arrant knave, who stays at the Committee at night so as to be in a position to open all the letters, and who almost caused the failure of the Charleroi affair. Oh! there are plenty more of them,' he

said ; ' Le Gendre has been tampered with, Tallien is a knave, Bourdon of Oise is no better.'

You can judge, citizen representatives, what a position I was in. A person whom I do not know, who doubtless does not know me either, giving out that he was initiated into the secrets of the Government, and going and letting them out in conversation ! I leave it to your wisdom to express an opinion. This talk has worried me extraordinarily ever since I heard it. I could not leave the room suddenly without depriving myself of the means of profiting by this conversation. The rest of our talk turned on those persons who use the Republic to further plans for their own interests, in order to go in for orgies of debauchery. Deschamps covered these immoral creatures with contempt, assuring me that the Government would manage to catch them one day and bring them to justice. Here the conversation ended. I took leave of the two commissaries, and returned to my friend's house to take something to eat. I at once consulted three other intimate friends of mine who happened to be together in this house. Their surprise was extreme. After much discussion, it was decided that I should inform the Committees of Public Safety and of General Security of all this. I did not do so on the spot, because I wanted a favourable opportunity. I knew that Hector Barère was to come within our walls. He is now in Boulogne. I place this faithful account of the conversation in his hands. I can trust him to use it as the wisdom and prudence of a republican dictate. I declare upon my honour, upon my word as a French citizen, that I am speaking the whole truth.

QUIGNON, SENIOR."

BOULOGNE, 25th Messidor, 11nd Republican Year.

"I forgot to say that, in the course of the conversation, Deschamps gave me to understand that he too was entrusted with a secret commission on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety; that he was in search of certain persons, and expected to find them in Rouen. He gave me the name of Fourquier [?], so that I should bear it in mind and communicate it to the Committee of Surveillance of this commune of Boulogne.<sup>1</sup> 'See,' he said, 'Here are our powers right enough,' showing me a sheet of paper. 'Upon my word, they are properly signed by Robespierre, Couthon, etc.' I could not see quite clearly whether they were, for I had no time to look at them closely.

QUIGNON, SENIOR."<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that, by the beginning of the month of Messidor,<sup>3</sup> Deschamps knew that Carnot was Robespierre's chief enemy at the Committee of Public Safety; that he knew the accusation brought by Saint-Just against Carnot: "that he had almost caused the failure of the affair at Charleroi"; and that he mentioned among the immoral deputies who ought to be punished Tallien, Legendre and Bourdon of Oise.

<sup>1</sup> This was to do with that Fourquet whom Deschamps was instructed to arrest.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 79. There is a note on it in another hand: "Document which should be considered seriously, and which tallies with the pamphlet entitled, *Les Causes secrètes du 9 thermidor*, by Vilate." In this pamphlet Vilate makes Barère out to be the mainspring of the plot against Robespierre. There is another note on the document: "Deschamps was guillotined. It was Barère who laid this document before the Tribunal. It was thus that he punished indiscretions." Deschamps was guillotined on the 5th Fructidor, Year II.

<sup>3</sup> In order to be at Boulogne on the 15th Messidor, Deschamps must have left Paris on the 13th or at latest on the morning of the 14th. Perhaps he was present at the session of the Jacobins on the 13th Messidor, at which Robespierre denounced the new "Indulgents."



There was one passage in Quignon's letter, brought to Barère by his relative, which must have been intensely interesting to him : namely, that in which Deschamps complains of the evil-disposed persons who exaggerated the success of our armies. Barère, whose practice it was to extol our victories in his perorations, might have profited by the hint.

It was almost immediately after the reception of this letter, which must have reached Paris at the end of Messidor,<sup>1</sup> that Barère began to abandon his prudent reserve and range himself more and more on the side of Robespierre's enemies.

On the 21st Messidor, at the Jacobins, Robespierre had endeavoured to set the deputies' minds at rest with regard to the rumours representing him as premeditating further blood-letting among them : " People are trying to persuade every member that the Committee of Public Safety has proscribed him. This plot really exists. . . . They are trying to make the Convention tremble, to prejudice it against the Revolutionary Tribunal and restore the system of Danton and Camille Desmoulins. On all sides the seeds of discord have been sown. . . . I beg all members to be on their guard against the treacherous insinuations of certain persons, who, alarmed

<sup>1</sup> I do not know at what date Hector Barère returned to Paris bringing Quignon's letter, which is dated the 25th Messidor. On the 6th Thermidor a deputation of the people's society of Boulogne-sur-Mer appeared at the Jacobins, and complained of the evil-disposed persons who represented Boulogne as a second Coblenz. As doubt was cast upon the patriotism of Boulogne, Deschamps, " freshly arrived from those parts," informed them that the " aristocrats there were all locked up, and the constituted authorities were now only composed of sans-culottes." While Deschamps was thus going bail for the civism of the authorities of Boulogne, he was doubtless unaware that they were denouncing him to the Committee of Public Safety.

for themselves, desire to make others share their fears. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Barère was replying indirectly to this speech when on the 2nd Thermidor he said from the tribune of the Convention: "Citizens, those invested with a terrible but necessary authority should not go about influencing the popular sections by carefully prepared speeches. The people must watch them both in office and at home." <sup>2</sup> In other words, Barère reproached Robespierre—of course without naming him—with stirring up the Jacobins and the Duplays' circle against the Government. This was the first time that he ventured timidly to join in the battle. In his pocket he had the letter from Boulogne.

Curiously enough, on the next day, the 3rd Thermidor, the younger Robespierre, no doubt from information supplied by Deschamps, complained at the Jacobins "that people in the department of Pas-de-Calais, which deserved to be more peaceable, were shameless enough to say that he was under arrest as a moderate." "Well, yes! I am a moderate, if by this word is understood a citizen who is not satisfied with proclaiming the principles of morality and justice, but wants them to be applied."

A few months later, Billaud-Varenne, in a memorandum defending his line of action, accused Robespierre of having sent to the Army of the North "one Deschamps, to sow mistrust of the Committee of Public Safety, by representing his colleague in charge of the military operations as a conspirator." <sup>3</sup>

If by the end of Messidor Carnot had still felt any scruples about joining the conspirators, was not Quignon's letter calculated to remove them?

<sup>1</sup> Buchez and Roux, t. XXXIII, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 379-380.

<sup>3</sup> See above, *Mémoire*, etc., p. 43.

At the very date upon which Deschamps was revealing to Quignon Carnot's manœuvres against Robespierre, a rumour was going round in the neighbourhood of Lyons that Robespierre had broken with Collot d'Herbois. "I assure you," wrote an anonymous correspondent to Robespierre on the 20th Messidor from a cottage to the south of Ville-Affranchie, "that I felt myself new-born when the trusty and enlightened friend who had returned from Paris, where he had been in a position to study you in your offices, assured me that, far from being the intimate friend of Collot d'Herbois, you were not pleased to see him at the Committee of Public Safety; but that, since he had a party in Paris, it would perhaps be dangerous for the Committee to exclude him from its midst."<sup>1</sup>

Already rumours of the dissensions which had broken out in the heart of the committees had even passed the frontiers. The representative Gillet wrote from Nivelles (Brabant) on the 23rd Messidor to the Committee of Public Safety, sending three numbers of the newspaper *Le Mercure universel*, printed at Brussels: "Like me, you will doubtless read with surprise in No. 361 that Bourdon of Oise and Tallien are regarded by our ferocious enemies as the champions of the faction which ought, according to them, to overthrow the Committee of Public Safety." It must be admitted that the "ferocious enemies" were well informed. From Nantes on the 3rd Thermidor, July 21, 1794, the representative Bô

<sup>1</sup> The anonymous correspondent who wrote this letter introduces himself as one "of the luckless victims of the affair of Lyons . . . ruined, unfortunate and hiding in a wretched little country place for having accepted a position on a committee of surveillance before the events of May 29 (1793)." He denounced to Robespierre Collot's crimes at Lyons. See his letter in Buchez and Roux. t. XXX, pp. 417-420.

sent to the Committee of Public Safety a note written by Fouché to his sister, which Bô had been able to get hold of "by a clever trick." The note was in the following terms :

"I ought to set your mind at rest on two points : one, our little girl is better ; and two, I have nothing to fear from the slanders of Maximilien Robespierre. The Jacobin Society invited me to come and defend myself at its session ; I did not go, for Robespierre reigns as master there. This society has become a tribunal. In a little while you will learn the issue of this event, which will, I hope, redound to the profit of the Republic."

Bô adds in his covering letter that this note reveals the existence of factions who must be struck down ruthlessly.<sup>1</sup>

After Thermidor, the victors endeavoured to justify their actions in the eyes of republican France, by trying to give some show of reality to the fable which they had started about "Robespierre's conspiracy." They examined the nephew and son of Duplay, the carpenter—Simon Duplay, who had lost a limb at Valmy and had since been known as Duplay of the wooden leg,<sup>2</sup> and Jacques Duplay, both of whom were in prison, with their whole family. The following are the records of their examination, which are interesting as revealing the state of mind of the Thermidorians : <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aulard, *Actes du Comité de Salut public* ; t. XV, p. 345. Bô sent three more letters of Fouché's on the 8th Thermidor. Ibid., t. XV, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Duplay has been made the subject of a recent study by M. L. Grasilier. See the notice of it in *Annales révolutionnaires*, t. VI, 1913, p. 418 seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 79.



## NATIONAL CONVENTION

*Committee of General Security*

This 12th Nivôse, Year III of the French Republic one and indivisible.

"The Committee of General Security orders that in pursuance of its ordinance dated the 18th Frimaire, Duplay, ex-juryman of the revolutionary tribunal, and Duplay, known for his wooden leg, shall be temporarily delivered up by the house of detention of Le Plessis, and brought to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock to the police section of the Committee, to be examined by Harmand, one of its members, and shall forthwith be restored to the above-mentioned house.

It charges the Commandant of the gendarmerie in attendance upon the Committee to execute the present warrant."

(Signed) HARMAND, MATHIEU, BENTABOLE, BOUDIN, MEAULLE, LEGENDRE; representatives of the people forming the Committee of General Security.

*Committee of General Security, Section of Police of Paris*

This 12th Nivôse, Year III of the French Republic, one and indivisible.

"There appeared before the Committee Citizen Simon Duplay, resident in Paris, Rue Honnoré [*sic*], Section of the Pikes No. 366, in the house of his uncle Maurice Duplay.

Who answered the questions put to him as follows:

*Question*: Was it not in your uncle's house that the brothers Robespierre had their lodging?

*Answer*: Yes; but the younger Robespierre left it after his return from the Army of Italy, and went to lodge in the Rue Florentin.

*Question* : Are you not aware that on the 8th Thermidor, or a few days before, several members of the Committee of Public Safety dined with Robespierre the elder ?

*Answer* : No ; except for Barère, who dined there ten, twelve or fifteen days before, without being able to specify which.<sup>1</sup>

*Question* : Are you not aware that Saint-Just and Lebas dined there at the same time ?

*Answer* : No.

*Question* : During the dinner at which Barère was present, did you not hear Robespierre propose a reconciliation with the members of the Convention and the Committees who appeared to be opposed to him ?

*Answer* : No ; I even believe that the dinner in question was previous to the dissension which has since broken out at the Committee of Public Safety between some one of the members composing it and Robespierre.

*Question* : Do you know what was the cause of this division between the members of the Committee of Public Safety and Robespierre ?

*Answer* : No.

*Question* : Do you not know that Robespierre, apart from the general police of the Republic, of which he had assumed the charge, also wished to direct the armies ; and that it was from this that the division in question arose ? <sup>2</sup>

*Answer* : No, I even know that Robespierre understood nothing about the art of war.

*Question* : Have you not heard on various occasions this same Robespierre declaim against the victories of the armies of the Republic, turn

<sup>1</sup> An interesting detail showing that the intimacy of Robespierre with Barère had survived the violent scenes at the beginning of Messidor.

<sup>2</sup> This question shows the importance of the estrangement between Robespierre and Carnot.

them to ridicule, and say, at other moments, that the sacrifice of six thousand men was nothing when it was a question of principle ?

*Answer* : No ; on the contrary, I saw him on various occasions rejoice at our victory, and I never heard him make the last remark.

*Question* : Do you not know that Saint-Just and Lebas, during the different missions which they carried out in the departments and to the armies, were in direct correspondence with Robespierre ?

*Answer* : I am unaware of it.

*Question* : A few days before the 9th Thermidor, did not Robespierre have brought away from the general police office several cardboard portfolios and the papers contained in them : and are you not aware that somebody in the house of Citizen Duplay, your uncle, was employed in this removal ?

*Answer* : No ; I have no knowledge of this removal.

*Question* : Have you not seen, or do you not know, that Englishmen and other foreigners often came to see Robespierre ?

*Answer* : No, I have seen no foreigners come to visit Robespierre, except those who, in virtue of a decree of the National Convention, were obliged to leave Paris, who were asking for exemptions or requisitions, and, to this end, left their memoranda at the house.

*Question* : Did you not see on various occasions, a few days before the 9th Thermidor, Fleuriot, mayor of Paris, and other municipal officers and police commissioners, come to see Robespierre, and have secret and private conversations with him ?

*Answer* : No.

*Question* : Did you never see Henriot, ex-

commandant of the National Guard, come there ?

*Answer* : I saw him come to the house sometimes, but nearly a month or so before this period.

The report having been read over. . . .

S. DUPLAY. HARMAND."

#### NATIONAL CONVENTION

##### *Committee of General Security. Section of Police of Paris*

This 12th Nivôse, Year III of the French Republic one and indivisible.

"There appeared before the Committee Citizen Jacques Maurice Duplay, ordinarily resident in the house of his father, a carpenter, No. 366, Rue Honnoré [*sic*], Section of the Pikes, Paris.

Who replied to the questions put to him as follows :

*Question* : Citizen, was it not in your father's house that the brothers Robespierre had their lodging ?

*Answer* : Yes.

*Question* : Are you not aware that a few days before the 9th Thermidor, perhaps even on the 8th, Barère, Collot, Billaud-Varenne, and several other members of the former Committees of Public Safety and of General Security dined with Robespierre the elder ? <sup>1</sup>

*Answer* : No ; they had not been for nearly three months, so far as I can remember.

*Question* : Is it not true that, about the same time, Saint-Just and Lebas dined at your father's house with Robespierre the elder ?

*Answer* : Lebas often dined there, for he had married one of my sisters. Saint-Just rarely

<sup>1</sup> The interrogators are Thermidorians of the Right trying to implicate the Thermidorians of the Left, formerly members of the Committees, which had already been denounced by Lecointre.



dined there; but he frequently came to see Robespierre, and used to go up to his study without speaking to anybody.

*Question* : At the dinner of which I am speaking, did not you hear Saint-Just propose to Robespierre that he should become reconciled with some members of the Convention and the Committees who appeared to be opposed to him?

*Answer* : No; I only know that they seemed greatly divided.

*Question* : Have you any ideas about these divisions?

*Answer* : I know nothing about it except from the discussions which took place on the subject at the Jacobins, and from the altercation which was said to have taken place between the elder Robespierre and Carnot at the Committee of Public Safety.

*Question* : Did you not hear Robespierre say that popular government, as organized by the Convention, could not go on?

*Answer* : No; I never heard him say anything of the sort.

*Question* : Did you not hear him say that part of the National Convention must be sent to the scaffold?

*Answer* : No; I only heard it said at the Jacobins, by Couthon, that there were six persons in the heart of the Convention from whom it would be a good thing to deliver it, or some such remark.<sup>1</sup>

*Question* : A few days before the 9th Thermidor, did you not go to the general police office with Robespierre or Saint-Just, or with orders and emissaries of theirs?

<sup>1</sup> "The virtue and energy of the National Convention can crush at will the five or six little human figures whose hands are full of the wealth of the Republic and foul with the blood of the innocents whom they have slaughtered." (Couthon's speech at the Jacobins, 6th Thermidor.)

*Answer*: No; I am not aware that anybody in the house went to the general police office; and Robespierre used to go to bed fairly early since he had absented himself from the Committee of Public Safety.

*Question*: Are you not aware that, a few days before the events of the 9th Thermidor, Robespierre and Saint-Just had some cardboard cases containing various papers removed from the general police office?

*Answer*: I only know that about a month before that day, especially during the time when Robespierre was in charge of the general police of the Republic,<sup>1</sup> one of the heads of section of the said police office used to bring him every morning several papers in a portfolio, which he would send back after reading them.

*Question*: Do you not know that Saint-Just and Lebas corresponded directly with Robespierre during their missions with the armies.

*Answer*: I only know that Saint-Just and Lebas, during their missions, often wrote to the Committee of Public Safety, but I have no knowledge of their having written direct to Robespierre. I may add that after the capture of Landrécy, being then commissaries with the Army of the North, they made a secret visit to Paris to confer with the Committee of Public Safety about the plan of campaign.<sup>2</sup>

*Question*: Are you not aware that some English-

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre was in charge of the police office during the absence of Saint-Just with the Army of the North.

<sup>2</sup> Saint-Just and Lebas had been sent to the Army of the North by an order of the Committee of Public Safety of the 10th Floréal. At Guise on the 14th Floréal they learnt the news of the capture of Landrécies. Saint-Just is noted as present at the Session of the Committee of Public Safety on the 20th Floréal. He was absent on the days before and after. So it was on the 20th Floréal that he came secretly to Paris. His latest biographer knows nothing about this.

men often used to come and see Robespierre, and were admitted secretly ?

*Answer* : No ; I only saw Arthur there, whose father was English.<sup>1</sup> I have never seen any others.

The report having been read over. . . .

J. M. DUPLAY. HARMAND."

These two examinations disappointed the expectations of Harmand (of Meuse), the former Girondin who conducted them. None the less, the " Robespierre conspiracy " continued in his eyes to pass for a certain and proved fact. Are there not, even nowadays, historians who believe in it ?

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, President of the Section of the Pikes (Place Vendôme) and friend of Robespierre, guillotined on the 12th Thermidor.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INTRIGUES AGAINST ROBESPIERRE IN THE SPRING OF 1794 — TRUCHON AND ROCH MARCANDIER.<sup>1</sup>

ON the 15th Floréal, Year II, Citizen Lhoste living at No. 111, Rue du Temple, was accosted by one of his neighbours, Citizen Truchon, a well-known revolutionary of the section of Les Graviillers. Truchon took him by the arm and said to him: "I must show you something." He drew a pamphlet from his pocket; it was the speech made by Billaud-Varenne before the Convention the 1st Floréal previously; he read out from page 9, line 6, the following passage: "The knave Pericles made a pretence of loving the people in order to hide the chains which he forged for the Athenians; for a long time he gave men to believe that he never ascended the tribune without saying to himself: 'Consider that you are about to address free men'; but this same Pericles, having succeeded in seizing absolute power, became the most bloody despot." Having finished reading, Truchon looked at Lhoste, enjoyed his astonishment and asked him: "Don't you recognize Robespierre?" Lhoste prudently replied that he could not make any personal application without reading what went before, and that he would therefore buy Billaud-Varenne's speech; but that, for the rest, "all that could apply to Robespierre at present was the fine side of Pericles."

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires* for May-June 1922.



It was Lhoste himself who reported his conversation with Truchon in these terms, when he was examined, three weeks later, by the committee of surveillance of the section of Les Gravilliers.<sup>1</sup>

Germain Truchon, who put this interpretation upon Billaud-Varenne's thought, and divined with unusual perspicacity what dissensions were about to break out within the Committee of Public Safety—Truchon, then, was in communication with Robespierre's enemies. At the section of Les Gravilliers he had known Léonard Bourdon, the schoolmaster, who had become a member of the Convention. Supported by Bourdon, he had joined battle with Jacques Roux and his partisans and gained an advantage over them. He was also intimate with another member of the Convention, who was prominent among the leading enemies of the "Incorruptible," Goupilleau de Montaigu, whom he had known before the Revolution, when they were both pleading as barristers before the Parlement of Paris.

The Thermidorians were never brilliantly distinguished for their morality. Germain Truchon, their instrument, had been imprisoned at Bicêtre for seven years, by a decree of the Parlement, and had not regained his liberty till August 13, 1791. Twice married, he was involved in lawsuits with both wives. His property had been sequestered by order of the court, so he lived by setting up as adviser on disputed cases, and by paid work done for the public departments. He had appeared on the revolutionary Commune of August 10, then among the so-called judges who presided over the prison massacres in September 1792. After the 9th Thermidor he boasted that he had saved many people from

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 477535.

massacre, for example, the Citoyenne Saint-Brice and young Tourzel. But he was accused of misappropriating the valuables of the victims. Blache, the police agent, who next employed him as an "observer," complained of his immorality, and alluded to him in a circumstantial report as a hypocrite and a rogue. His reputation was so bad that, though he was a member of the Civil Committee of his section, the Revolutionary Committee of Les Gravilliers had him arrested as a suspect on the 8th Prairial. He was to remain in prison up to the end of the Convention.

Had Truchon misjudged Billaud-Varenne's intentions in supposing that the latter was attacking Robespierre under the name of Pericles? If we had no means of answering the question but Billaud-Varenne's speech of the 1st Floréal, we should be rather in difficulties. This speech had as its object to lay down to the Convention the guiding lines of the policy which the Committee of Public Safety intended to follow at the time when the campaign began, and consists for the most part of vague generalizations. Billaud threatens all "those who are paralysing the march of the Revolution," he denounces in advance the peril which liberty might run in consequence of the ambition of a daring general; the ambition of generals enables him to pass to that of civil leaders and to refer to the example of Pericles: "Every people jealous of its liberty," he said, "must be on its guard against the very virtues of those occupying prominent positions."

Of all the phrases in his report, this one best lent itself to an allusion to Robespierre. But Billaud next entered upon a lengthy denunciation of the spirit of conquest. He announced that the Committee would stop the war so soon as the national territory was liberated: "We are march-

ing not towards aggression, but towards a victorious defence, not to be led on by the intoxication of triumph, but to stop fighting the instant that the death of an enemy soldier ceases to serve the cause of liberty." In this Billaud was in full agreement with Robespierre. His report does not enlighten us much upon the question which we have asked. But we have Saint-Just's last speech, the one which he had written in defence of Robespierre and in denunciation of his enemies, Billaud and Collot d'Herbois, the speech of which he could only manage to deliver the opening phrases at the tragic session of the 9th Thermidor. Now in this speech Saint-Just directs all his efforts against Billaud-Varenne, whom he represents as a knave who flattered Robespierre to his face, but blackened and slandered him in his absence. "In order that they should be able to dare all and justify all," said Saint-Just, "it appeared to me that the Committees were being prepared to receive and relish the impressions produced by calumny. Billaud announced his scheme in disjointed words; at one moment he pronounced the word *Pisistratus*, at the next that of 'danger.' He would call an absent person *Pisistratus* who the day before, when present, had been his friend." It looks as if this passage throws some light on the matter. If Billaud compared Robespierre with the tyrant *Pisistratus* in Messidor, he may well have compared him with the tyrant *Pericles* in Floréal. Truchon, while loitering about near the future Thermidorians, may well have overheard their confidences. He divined Billaud-Varenne's meaning.

If the latter were attacking Robespierre covertly as early as the 1st Floréal, that is to say, more than three months before the 9th Thermidor,

the intrigue against the "Incorruptible," the beginning of which is generally assigned to Prairial, must be put back at least a month. This is an interesting discovery. It is generally alleged, on the word of the Thermidorians, that the dissensions among the members of the Committee of Public Safety were caused, on the one hand, by the decree of the 18th Floréal on the national festivals, and on the other hand, by the decree of the 22nd Prairial on the Revolutionary Tribunal. Now, when Billaud set France and the Convention on their guard against "the very virtues of the men occupying prominent posts," when he recalled the example of Pericles, Robespierre had not yet developed his religious policy, still less his ideas on the reorganization of revolutionary justice. Therefore Billaud had other motives for covertly undermining his colleague's popularity than those which he afterwards mentioned.

As early as the 13th Messidor Robespierre complained at the Jacobins of the slanders which found credence even among his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety. "I am represented," he said, "as a tyrant and oppressor of the national representatives. . . . Louvet's accusation is repeated in a document found among the papers of the secretary of Camille Desmoulins, the friend of the conspirator Danton. This document was just about to come out when the Committee of General Security discovered it and sent it to the Committee of Public Safety. In it the plotters adduce all that has taken place during the Revolution in support of their denunciation of an alleged system of dictatorship. If we were to examine into the absurdity of this denunciation it would be useless to mention it, for such clumsy slanders are not likely to lead citizens astray; but we shall see that they were only intended



as a manifesto, preparatory to a forcible attack on the patriots. What will you say if I tell you that these atrocities did not revolt even men invested with a sacred character; that even among my colleagues some have been found to circulate them?"

It is possible to verify and check these facts at which Robespierre merely hints. This secretary of Camille Desmoulins, who drew up an act of accusation against the "Incorruptible" which was ready for printing when he was arrested, is not a myth. His name was Roch Marcandier.

Born at Guise, like Camille Desmoulins,<sup>1</sup> in 1767, and one of a poor and numerous family, he came to Paris in 1786 and learnt the craft of a printer. His elder brother was a master at the Collège Louis-le-Grand and had had Camille Desmoulins among his pupils. When Camille Desmoulins started his *Revolutions of France and Brabant*, Roch Marcandier kept the subscription bureau and acted, when necessary, as editor's secretary. From time to time short articles by him appeared in Marat's and Fréron's papers. He was an ardent member of the Cordeliers Club. But Desmoulins ceased issuing his paper in August 1791. Marcandier lost his means of livelihood. In 1787 he had married Marie-Anne Coirnot. He fell into a state of destitution. For a time the Girondin deputy Kersaint took him as his secretary; but he only kept this place for two months and had to live by his wits. After August 10th he entered the service of Roland, then Minister of the Interior, who employed him in his police force. Turning against what he had adored, he began to rend his former friends the

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Fleury, *Roch Marcandier*, Laon, 1850. *Archives nationales*, W. 413, F7, 4445, F7, 477427, Library of the City of Paris, Dubuisson Collection. *Unpublished papers found at Robespierre's lodging*, etc.

Cordeliers. He drew up reports against them, and Roland did not hesitate to communicate to the Convention, at the session of October 29, 1792, a letter in which Marcandier accused the Cordeliers of preparing for fresh massacres, invoking Robespierre's name in confirmation of this.<sup>1</sup> Robespierre made a contemptuous answer to this insinuation.

A few months later Marcandier brought out a violent periodical pamphlet, the *True Friend of the People*, of which twelve numbers appeared between May 10 and July 21, 1793. His blows were particularly aimed against Danton and his friends, whom he called "the men of prey." He had become the general factotum of the Girondins, and they obtained the release of his wife when she was arrested for a time, in May 1793, for a breach of the regulations about vending books in the street. When the Girondins were struck down by the insurrection of the 2nd June, Marcandier managed to elude the police of the Mountain, and remained in hiding in Paris.<sup>2</sup>

When he saw Camille Desmoulins attacking the Mountain, in its turn, in the *Vieux Cordelier*, he tried to effect a reconciliation with his former patron. On the 6th Pluviôse he wrote him the following curious letter, just after the day on which Danton's friends had protested before the Convention against the arrest of Camille Desmoulins' father-in-law<sup>3</sup>:

*Roch Marcandier to Camille Desmoulins*

"I see, Camille, in to-day's newspapers, that your father-in-law is in prison. Just as Jesus

<sup>1</sup> *Archives parlementaires*, t. LIII, p. 45, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> See the sessions of the Convention of May 12 and 16, 1793.

<sup>3</sup> For this arrest see the *Annales révolutionnaires*, t. XI, pp. 253-7.

Christ died for the sins of others, so your father-in-law is in unlawful durance on your account. Bourdon of Oise said that this arrest was the work of Vincent's clique. My conjectures as to this point are as follows: Lucron, a violent anarchist, Lucron, your former hairdresser, is a member of the revolutionary committee of the Section of Mucius Scævola; he has an influence in that committee such as all bold knaves manage to acquire over those who are not bold; since he has got the power, this man does nothing but persecute the best citizens, especially those whom he formerly had as customers. He is a great friend of Vincent. I have even been assured that he had a profitable position in the Ministry of War, which he only obtained by preaching slaughter, pillage and all the excesses of brigandage. Being a friend of Vincent's and having a position in the Ministry for War: there are two sufficient motives for persecuting you; but since the villains are not yet all-powerful enough to strike direct at you, they have turned their blows against your father-in-law. The offices of the War Ministry must have set the infamous Lucron to work to avenge the truths which you uttered against Barabbas Bouchotte. Enquire into this point, and you will see that I have put my finger on the true source of the intrigue. Find out at the same time whether it is true that this Lucron recently bought a magnificent house at Sèvres. If this fact is true, it will not be difficult to bring it home to Lucron that he only became the owner of this house by looting the poor wretches whom he caused to be arrested, and from whose houses he doubtless also carried off the library, clocks, pension warrants, etc. When this contemptible rogue wishes to get anyone he dislikes imprisoned, he usually accuses him of being in the pay of Pitt;

it was by this means that he managed, not long ago, to get hold of a warrant for my arrest. They put it to him that proofs were necessary. He answered that he would give them as soon as I was arrested ; that is to say, when once one is in prison and unable to defend oneself, the knaves are sure to get their slanders accepted as proofs. Me paid by Pitt ! During these six months that I have been proscribed by villains who have taken from me what little I possessed—even a packet of letters which Marat had written me—I have contracted debts of nearly a thousand *écus*.

I asked you for a meeting in order to impart to you certain facts concerning you, as well as four of your colleagues. You made no answer. I really do not know what construction to put upon your silence !

I have not seen the appearance of your No. 6. Are you afraid ? I had made up my mind to resume my journal. I had even sent the manuscript of No. 13 to be printed. But as I did not want to be a voice crying in the wilderness, I am going to give orders not to proceed with it.

I am sending you the manuscript which was to have been printed at the end of No. 13. You can read it and leave it with your door-keeper, where I will send and fetch it to-morrow evening ; I beg you not to lose it. If you would like us to have a conference, will you let me know ? I have some propositions to discuss with you which were made to me by the Père Duchesne.

Fraternal greetings,

R. MARCANDIER."

Gilbert Lucron, the hairdresser, against whom Marcandier was trying to set Camille Desmoulins, was indeed a member of the Revolutionary Com-



mittee of the Section of Mucius Scævola. He likewise occupied the position of "keeper of the Republic's stocks of iron for small arms at the former Convent of the Jacobins in the Rue Dominique." But Lucron had nothing of the savage anarchist about him. P. J. Audouin, a deputy in the Convention, paid a tribute to his probity and poverty when he was arrested as a terrorist in the Year III. But Marcandier did not look so closely at things. He wanted to take advantage of the incident to regain the good graces of Camille and the Dantonists. The last phrase of his letter, alluding to the "propositions" alleged to have been made him by the Père Duchesne, shows, if his word is to be trusted, that he was also seeking an alliance with the Hébertists. Any means were good enough, in his eyes, for striking at the deputies of the Mountain and at Robespierre.

The manuscript which he enclosed in his letter to Desmoulins was a pamphlet against Robespierre, afterwards published at the printing-works of the *Journal du Matin* under the following title: *Fragment from Sallust found among the papers of Camille Desmoulins, or Denunciation intended to be pronounced against tyranny with a few slight changes.*<sup>1</sup> Borrowing from Camille the allegorical devices employed in the *Vieux Cordelier*, the Girondin ex-police agent conceived the idea of putting into the mouth of Æmilius Lepidus a speech to the Roman people against Sulla. Sulla was of course Robespierre. "Romans, when I behold Sulla in the midst of his power and his crimes, I am less alarmed at the tyrant than at yourselves, at his villainy than at your virtue. . . . The Roman people, so recently the arbiter of nations, now stripped of their power, their glory

<sup>1</sup> *Bibl. nat.*, Lb<sup>41</sup> 1043, a 6-page pamphlet.

and their right of deliberating, condemned to poverty and contempt, have not even the nourishment which slaves do not lack. . . . The people see their fathers' houses a prey to the satellites of the tyrant and the prize of his misdeeds. The laws, justice, the public treasury, the provinces, the fate of nations are at the disposal of a single man. He alone has the right of life and death. Moreover, you have seen the human victims whom he has slaughtered, and the tombs drenched with the blood of citizens. . . . Except for a few satellites who are the accomplices of his crimes, where is the man who will undertake his defence ? . . . Whence, then, comes the boldness of Sulla ? It is because the ignorant rabble takes ferocity for courage, prosperity for virtue ; but at the slightest reverse, it would despise him as much as it once dreaded him. Perhaps it is also the specious pretext of peace and concord, for such are the names under which he disguises his outrages and parricide. He dares give it to be understood that the Romans cannot see an end to the war if the people, a prey to ravening oppressors, does not remain stripped of its heritage, if he himself is not invested with the sovereignty." These quotations are enough. Marcandier had profited by the lessons of Camille, his former master. He deftly turned famine and war-weariness into weapons against Robespierre. I do not know whether Camille responded to his advances, but he kept his manuscript, which was not published till after his death.

From the protection of his hiding-place Marcandier never ceased to spur on Robespierre's enemies. On the 20th Germinal, a few days after Danton's execution, he wrote to Legendre :

" One word, Legendre. All things prove that

Robespierre is an implacable enemy. All things prove that he desires domination, all things prove that he does not want a trace to remain of those who contributed towards bringing about our glorious revolution. You have acquired great popularity: you might be as well fitted to command as anybody. You took Danton's side. See what you have to fear for the present. See what you have to do for the present. . . . When you are loaded with chains, when you are left with nothing but rage at seeing your trust betrayed and at being led to the scaffold, there will no longer be time to say, 'Why did I not do this, why did I not do that?' . . . Nevertheless, it is this fate which awaits you. . . . Dufourny is a terrible warning.<sup>1</sup> Will you treat this advice as you did that which you communicated to the Convention? <sup>2</sup> . . . Just as you please. . . . I vow that it is pure cowardice. . . . You thought it was a trap laid by Robespierre himself, with the desire of testing you. . . . Whether that be true or false, you may believe that this letter is addressed to you by a man who is most sincerely attached to you, without knowing you privately, because of your ardent patriotism and talents; and be sure that if you perish, the love I bear my country would not long enable me to survive such a misfortune; but I shall not die alone, and, without being forced, I shall do for my country what everything demands that you should do to save it."<sup>3</sup>

Marcandier made a great mistake in reckoning

<sup>1</sup> Dufourny had just been struck off the roll of the Jacobins.

<sup>2</sup> On the 18th Germinal Legendre had declared to the Convention that he had received an anonymous letter, in which he was incited to assassinate Robespierre and Saint-Just.

<sup>3</sup> *Papiers inédits trouvés chez Robespierre* (unpublished papers found at Robespierre's lodging), t. I, p. 183.

upon Legendre. So soon as he received his letter he went and took it to the Committee of Public Safety.

A month later, on the 23rd Prairial, Marcandier committed the imprudence of again writing to Legendre, and this time he signed his letter :

PARIS, *this 23 Prairial, Year II.*

"CITIZEN,

In the deplorable position into which I have fallen by force of circumstances, I have had the misfortune to be reduced to living for a year remote from all society. With nobody to support or console me, I am, as it were, abandoned by all that breathes in nature. In spite of my vicissitudes, my eyes are always fixed upon public liberty and upon the lot of patriots who, like you, have walked with a firm step and uncorrupted in the paths of Revolution.

Citizen Legendre, I have most important things to communicate to you ; they concern you personally, with several of your colleagues. Come without delay, if you wish to hear them. My wife herself will give you my address ; I do not enclose it in my letter, for if it were to go astray I should be compromised.

Fraternal greetings,

R. MARCANDIER."<sup>1</sup>

The cowardly Legendre at once repaired to the Committee of General Security to arrange with it for the capture of Roch Marcandier, who was arrested on the information supplied by himself.<sup>2</sup> Marcandier and his wife were examined

<sup>1</sup> *Papiers inédits trouvés chez Robespierre*, t. I, p. 179. The editor has printed 25th Prairial by mistake for 23rd.

<sup>2</sup> Legendre wrote the following note to the Committee of Public Safety: "This 24th Prairial, Year II. Louis Legendre, representative of the people, presented himself before the Com-



by the Committee on the 30th Prairial. Voulland asked him what was the subject of the information which he wished to confide to Legendre. He answered: "To warn him that I had been told that there was talk of arresting him, with several of his colleagues, whose names I gave in a letter to Citizen Legendre."

"From whom did you obtain this information?"

"I had it from my brother, who in his turn told me that he had it from Citizen Crosnier, an engineer, employed in that capacity in the armies of the Republic, and who lodges in the Rue Fauxbourg Honoré, at the corner of the Petite Rue Verte."

He was next examined about the manuscripts which had been discovered in the course of the search made at his house.

"Are you the author of two manuscripts entitled *Robespierre's Conspiracy and Murder! Assassins!?*"

"Yes."

But he denied any intention of having these two pamphlets printed.

Voulland further asked him whether he had not furnished Camille Desmoulins with "a document having as its object the overthrow of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security," and whether he had not boasted that this document might be found among the condemned man's sealed-up papers. He admitted having written several times to Camille Des-

mittee and declared that he had received a letter from Roch Marcandier, who had been in hiding for a year, and whom he suspected of being an enemy of the country. He asked Citizen Legendre for a meeting, which the latter was not prepared to grant him without previously informing the Committee, inasmuch as he proposed to take all necessary measures on this occasion to place him in the Committee's hands." (*Papiers inédits*, I, p. 183.)

moulins, but he denied having sent him a manuscript attacking the Committees; which was obviously a lie.

Lastly, Voulland placed before his eyes two letters which he had written to Normand, the printer, about printing an address which he had drawn up to the forty-eight Sections. He admitted having written the letters, but pretended that he had burnt the address.

His wife was afterwards examined, and admitted that she had taken to the printer's a manuscript which might have been this address to the forty-eight Sections. The printer had refused to undertake it, and she had returned it to her husband.

Marcandier and his wife were condemned to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal on the 24th Messidor.

I have not found among the papers in the National Archives the two manuscripts which led to their condemnation. But it is not difficult to imagine their contents. Marcandier returned to the celebrated accusation of dictatorship brought by the Girondin Louvet against Robespierre, amplifying and completing it. He gave it the form of a manifesto, and this manifesto, Robespierre tells us, "was to be followed up by a forcible attack on patriots."

Robespierre believed that Roch Marcandier was merely an instrument in the hands of his enemies. He returned to him in his last speech, that of the 8th Thermidor, which he himself called his dying testament: "We are assured that warning had been received by the National Convention in general that a bill of impeachment was going to be introduced, aimed against me. The opinion of the deputies had been sounded as to this matter, and all things prove that the probity of

the National Convention forced the slanderers to abandon, or at least postpone, their crime. But who were these slanderers? In the first place, I can at once answer that, in a royalist manifesto which seems to be the original of all the slanders which are now being revived and was found among the papers of a well-known conspirator who has already paid the penalty of his misdeeds, we may read in so many words the following conclusion, addressed to the public enemies of every kind: '*If this wily demagogue no longer existed, if he had paid for his ambitious manœuvres with his head, the nation would be free; every man might make his thoughts public, and Paris would never have seen in its midst this multitude of murders vulgarly known by the misleading name of judgments of the revolutionary tribunal.*' "

We can see from the quotation which Robespierre gives from Marcandier's appeal that it was an incitement to assassinate him. Now we know that on the 4th Prairial Admiral had waited several hours for Robespierre to come out of the Committee of Public Safety; but, despairing of achieving his aim, because he had not found him, he had discharged his pistols at Collot d'Herbois. It is also a significant fact that, the day after this unsuccessful attack, on the 5th Prairial, the deputy Laurent Lecointre, an ardent Dantonist, had planned, on his own admission, with eight of his colleagues, to murder Robespierre.<sup>1</sup> It was a fortnight later that Marcandier was arrested, and among his papers was found a bill of impeachment directed against Robespierre, which ended in an appeal for his assassination.

<sup>1</sup> See Lecointre's pamphlet, which appeared after Thermidor under the title of *A Conspiracy formed on the 5th Prairial by nine representatives.*

We must bear these facts in mind if we are to understand what happened at the Committees on the eve of the 9th Thermidor. As early as the 1st Floréal, Billaud-Varenne had suggested in a speech to the Convention a comparison of Robespierre with Pericles. It was in Floréal, as Hippolyte Carnot further tells us, that the first dissensions broke out in the Committee of Public Safety. Lazare Carnot alluded to Robespierre and Saint-Just as "ridiculous dictators." How bitter for Robespierre, at the very moment when a treacherous accusation was arming his murderers for the blow, to observe that it met with credence even among his colleagues in the Government! From this to supposing that there was an understanding between his murderers and his slanderers was not a very long step. However, the proof that such an understanding existed is not yet forthcoming. The Truchons and Roch Marcandiers were no doubt persons without morals, capable of any deed, but, in the present state of the documents, it cannot be absolutely affirmed that they were the instruments of Billaud-Varenne, Lecointre, or others. What remains certain is that the atmosphere of suspicion which the Girondins had created round about Robespierre not only had not evaporated, but had grown denser since the fall of the Dantonists and Hébertists. The immense services rendered by Robespierre, and his popularity, gave equal offence to his colleagues on the Committee. The all-pervading atmosphere of calumny was doing its work. He had been called the "Incorruptible" too long.



## CHAPTER X

### ROBESPIERRE AT THE COMMUNE ON THE 9TH THERMIDOR <sup>1</sup>

WE think we know the Revolution, but when we study it from the original documents we soon perceive that it is almost unknown. The most flimsy legends are handed faithfully down from historian to historian.

None of them is better accredited than that which explains the final defeat of the Commune on the 9th Thermidor by Robespierre's supposed legalitarian scruples. We are asked to believe that Robespierre persisted for hours in his refusal to sign the call to arms which was presented to him.

Let us read the most recent narrative of the 9th Thermidor, that which M. G. Pariset has recently published under the editorship of Ernest Lavisse.

"At the Commune," it runs, "they argued and wrote letters, but did not act. However, after he had received news of the decree outlawing him, and Couthon had arrived, Robespierre finally determined to intervene. 'In whose name?' he enquired, out of a last scruple for legality. 'In the name of the people,' replied Couthon and his friends. And he was signing a proclamation, when his hand was arrested [by the troops of the Convention rushing in] at the third letter of his name." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Revue de France* for February 15, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *La Révolution*, by G. Pariset, p. 242.

This is the traditional version, which has been handed down from one to another for more than a century past.

M. Pariset speaks in terms which differ but little from those of M. Aulard: "If," writes the latter, "the Commune delayed so long to march on the Convention, the reason was that Robespierre had refused to place himself at the head of the movement. He talked, he did not act; he even refused to sign a call to arms; not that he lacked courage, but he desired a sort of legal insurrection, the necessary components of which were lacking. Yielding to the importunities of his partisans, he took up his pen and traced the first three letters of his name.

"Was it at this moment that the troops of the Convention debouched on the Place de la Grève? When Léonard Bourdon, accompanied by a few gendarmes, gained an entrance to the Hôtel de Ville, he found Robespierre lying stretched on the ground, with his jaw fractured by a pistol-shot."<sup>1</sup>

M. Aulard himself has done no more than condense Ernest Hamel's more complete narrative in his *Histoire de Robespierre*.

"Lerebours," says Hamel, "drew up and wrote out in his own hand the following appeal to the Section of the Pikes, which was that of Robespierre:

"'COMMUNE OF PARIS, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,

"'The 9th Thermidor.

"'Courage, patriots of the Section of the Pikes, liberty is triumphing! Already those whom their steadfastness rendered formidable to traitors are at liberty; the people is everywhere showing itself worthy of its character. The place of meet-

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire politique de la Révolution*, p. 499.

ing is at the Commune [of which] the worthy Henriot will carry out the orders of the Executive Committee, which has been created to save the country.'

[LOUVET, PAYAN, LEREBOURS, LEGRAND, RO.]<sup>1</sup>

"Then," Hamel continues, "Lerebours signed; with him signed Legrand, Louvet and Payan. The question was to get the signature of Robespierre, who was seated at the middle of the table, at the council-table, between the mayor, Fleuriot-Lescot, and the national agent Payan. For a long time Saint-Just, his brother and the members of the Executive Committee besought him to append his signature to the foot of this stirring appeal; but in vain. 'In whose name?' Maximilien kept saying. 'In the name of the Convention,' replied Saint-Just. 'Wherever we are, it is.' It seemed to Maximilien that in sanctioning by his signature this sort of appeal to insurrection against the Convention, he would be playing the part of Cromwell, which he had so often lashed since the beginning of the Revolution; and he persisted in his refusal. Couthon, who had arrived late, spoke of issuing a proclamation to the armies, and agreed that they could not write in the name of the Convention; but he enjoined on Robespierre to do so in the name of the French people, adding that there were still friends of humanity in France, and that virtue would triumph in the end. Owing to Maximilien's long hesitation all was lost."

And Hamel, convinced that this hesitation lasted several hours and paralysed the Commune, afterwards explains that Barras and Léonard

<sup>1</sup> I have replaced between brackets the words omitted by Ernest Hamel from the facsimile of the original published in 1908 by G. Lenôtre and Marty.

Bourdon had time to collect troops and encourage defections from among the defenders of the Hôtel de Ville : " Léonard Bourdon, at the head of his band, managed to enter the Hôtel de Ville by the great central staircase without hindrance, and to get as far as the Porte de l'Égalité. It was then a little after two o'clock in the morning. At that moment Robespierre, vanquished by the insistence of his friends, and thinking a little tardily of the seriousness of the circumstances, at last decided to sign the address to the Section of the Pikes. He had already written the first two letters of his name, *Ro*, when a shot rang out suddenly from the direction of the corridor separating the hall of the General Council from that of the municipal body. Immediately afterwards Robespierre was seen to collapse, the pen fell from his hands, and on the sheet of paper, on which he had traced but two letters, we may see great drops of blood which had spurted from a great wound which he had received in the cheek." <sup>1</sup>

It is a dramatic scene, and it is perhaps on account of its literary interest that it has been accepted as accurate by all those who have since written following Ernest Hamel.

The document on which are to be read the first two letters of Robespierre's name still bears at the foot of the page, about the middle, an oval stain about two centimetres in length. For Hamel, for M. Lenôtre, who has given a facsimile of it, for all those who look upon this relic with the eye of faith, it is a spot of blood.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de Robespierre*, 1867, pp. 788-90.

<sup>2</sup> The document formed part of the collection of Rousselin de Saint Albin, who was Barras' secretary. This collection afterwards passed into the hands of M. Georges Duruy. It is at present in the Musée Carnavalet. There is a photographic reproduction of it to be seen in the *Mémoires* of Barras, t. I, f. 195.



And yet, to anyone rereading this document with an open mind, Ernest Hamel's narrative cannot but suggest overwhelming doubts.

What! Can Robespierre have hesitated for several hours to sign these few lines? They are not strictly speaking a call to arms, as M. Aulard says, any more than they are a proclamation, as M. Pariset seems to think. They are simply a letter of notification, opening with a cry of joy: "Courage, patriots of the Section of the Pikes, liberty is triumphing! Already those whom their steadfastness has rendered formidable to traitors are at liberty. . . ." The meaning of these phrases is very simple. Those who wrote them desired to announce a piece of good news to the Section of the Pikes, which would please and put heart into it: the news that the patriotic representatives who had been put in prison had been set free and had joined the Commune. They added: "The meeting-place is the Commune, of whose Executive Committee the worthy Henriot will carry out the orders, and which has been created to save the country." What does that mean, if not that they were giving notice to their friends and partisans at once of the release of Henriot and of the formation of the Executive Committee? There is nothing there to indicate an agonizing or desperate situation. The letter was written, not at the last moment, when the Commune saw itself abandoned by its troops and threatened with being surrounded, but, on the contrary, during the early moments of confidence, when nothing was desperate, after the arrival of the proscribed members of the Convention, and the return of Henriot on his release.

Similar letters, couched in almost identical terms, were written by the Executive Committee to the municipalities adjoining the capital, to

those of Choisy and Bercy.<sup>1</sup> Robespierre was asked to place his abbreviated signature at the foot of the letter intended for the Section of the Pikes, for it was there that he was domiciled, and had the greatest number of friends. Why should he have answered by a refusal, why should he anxiously have asked Fleuriot, the mayor, the national agent Payan, and Saint-Just, *in whose name* he could sign this letter? And why should Saint-Just have declared to him that he could sign it *in the name of the Convention*? So much fuss is not necessary before signing a circular, a notification.

Ernest Hamel's narrative not only sins against probability, but, what is more serious, it sins against the documents and the facts.

The letter addressed to the Section of the Pikes has a history which throws light on its meaning and significance.

Two days after these events, at the session of the 11th Thermidor, Barère referred to the document in the report which he presented to his colleagues in the Convention, and cited it, not against Robespierre, but against Lerebours, the Commissary for poor relief, who had left his post under the Government to join the rebellious Commune. Barère expresses himself in the following terms:

"[Lerebours] took up his position [at the Commune], he took part in its deliberations, he was a member of the Executive Committee and wrote several letters to the sections. This one was intercepted, it was addressed to the Section

<sup>1</sup> See in the *Rapport* of Courtois, Floréal, An IV (pp. 56 and 122), the letters directed to the municipalities of Choisy and Bercy. Here the tone is more urgent. The municipalities are requested to bring their cannon. It had not been necessary to give this advice to the Section of the Pikes, whose gunners were already on the Place de la Grève.

of the Pikes, in which Robespierre had his lodging. Here is the letter, on which are written the two letters Ro, the first letters of the name of this cruel and crafty conspirator. Here is this infamous letter, which, when the Republic is in danger, can see nothing but the officials of a Commune, and, amid the dangers of revolution, sees no other meeting-place than the headquarters of the Commune. The nation is nothing for this traitorous Commissary. . . ." And that is all the comment Barère made.

What! If, as the legend would have it, the letter had been picked up from the table upon which Robespierre had collapsed two days before with a broken jaw, if it had borne the mark of the traitor's blood, if his signature had only been cut short by the arrival of the troops of the Convention, if on this signature had depended the triumph of order or of insurrection, would Barère, who knew so well how to strike a pathetic note, have expressed himself as he did? He stated that Robespierre only signed the first syllable of his name; yet he does not profit by the opportunity to tax him with cowardice! He says nothing of the spot of blood. And how should he mention it, when he assured them that the document was not found at the Hôtel de Ville, but "intercepted" in transmission?

We are able to throw light on Barère's document by a decisive piece of evidence.

We read in the unpublished Proceedings of the Revolutionary Committee of the Section of the Pikes for the 15th Thermidor:

"A member rose to speak, and said: 'It is essential for the honour and patriotism of the members of the Committee that the Committees of Public Safety and of General Security, es-

pecially since they have been completed, should know that the infamous letter addressed to the Committee by the insurgent Commune was not *intercepted*, as Citizen Barère said in his report; this is a mistake. This letter was received by our Committee, and it was our Committee which sent it to the Committees of Public Safety and General Security jointly; as is proved by the return in which this letter was included, and by the receipt for it which was brought back. The joint Committees have material proof of it before their eyes.'

One of the members of the Revolutionary Committee waited upon Citizen Barère this morning with regard to this matter, and he promised to rectify this error in the minutes." <sup>1</sup>

I have not found the rectification mentioned in the Proceedings of the Convention. But there is no doubt that things happened as the member of the Revolutionary Committee of the Section of the Pikes said. The letters, or rather, bulletins, which this Committee forwarded to the Committees of the Convention during the night of the 9-10 Thermidor are still in existence, and in one of them can be read :

"The Committee thought it ought to send [to the two joint Committees of Public Safety and General Security] two letters from the former Commune, addressed to the Committee, which did not allow itself to be influenced by this perfidy, but desired to communicate only with the joint Committees of Public Safety and General Security. It was the same letters as the enclosed which were burnt to-night in general assembly. The Committees will note that in the longer

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F7, 4778.



letter is to be read at the foot the beginning of a word, *Ro*. This initial revolted the Committee."

So it was during the morning of the 10th that the Committee of the Section of the Pikes sent to the victors the letter to which Barère, in his report on the next day, was to allude as an overwhelming piece of evidence against Lerebours. And let us observe that it was not the sole copy of the letter in question which was sent. There was doubtless a similar one for the Civil Committee of the Section. This one was burnt at an *auto-da-fé*.

But why is it that the Revolutionary Committee, which said it was revolted by reading this document, did not at once send it, that very night, to the members of the Convention? Why did it wait till the next day? The reason is not hard to guess. On the 10th Thermidor vengeance began upon Robespierre's accomplices. The Section of the Pikes was more suspect than the others, for the "tyrant" lived there, and had numbers of friends in it. The secretary of the Revolutionary Committee, a certain Moutonnet, felt suspicion weighing upon him. He was in dread of arrest and the Revolutionary Tribunal. He hastened to justify himself and produce testimonials. He asked his colleagues on the Revolutionary Committee to bear witness to his loyalty, and they complied, being doubtless as deeply compromised as he was. We read in the Proceedings of the 18th Thermidor:

"Citizen Moutonnet begs the Committee kindly to certify that, during the days of the 9th and 10th Thermidor, he was secretary to the Committee, and in this capacity, and as the organ of the

said Committee, he wrote, signed and despatched the return of correspondence with the joint Committees of Public Safety and General Security.

The Committee consequently certifies that Citizen Moutonnet was secretary to the Committee on the 9th and 10th Thermidor, and that in this capacity, and as the organ of the Committee, he wrote, signed and sent the returns of correspondence with the joint Committees of Public Safety and General Security.

The Committee further testifies that on the days of the 9th and 10th Thermidor Citizen Moutonnet proved his sincere attachment to the Convention and his hatred for the villains. The Committee regards as slanderous the denunciations of Citizen Moutonnet made to the Civil Committee by Montallier and Mangin, and orders that a copy of these minutes be handed to Citizen Moutonnet for him to make a fitting use of it. . . . Lhuillier, President ; Garnier, Secretary."

And yet, in his report of Floréal, Year IV, Courtois the Thermidorian, who had the papers of the Sections in his hands, referred to the attitude of the Revolutionary Committee of the Section of the Pikes and of its secretary Moutonnet in rather severe terms :

"I am unable," he says, "to judge of the conduct of the Revolutionary Committee [of this section]. As for the general assembly, if we are to believe what is to be found in the papers of the Jacobins, and a note signed Moulin, this Section promised to fraternize with the Jacobins, which had become the accomplice of the rebels. If we take the mere word of the minutes of the assembly, it behaved with both energy and

delicacy ; but if we consider all the facts together, in spite of the assertion of the Revolutionary Committee, which is contradicted by the very minutes of the Section themselves, it is certain that it did not meet until two in the morning, and that it took every possible precaution not to give a decision, till it was certain that events were turning out to the advantage of the Convention, to which it rallied. The armed forces went and ranged themselves on the side of the Convention. One Moutonnet, a member of the Revolutionary Committee, seemed to me to have played a most equivocal part during that day.”<sup>1</sup>

Courtois, who wrote at an interval of more than a year, is not seeking to spread suspicion more widely by his report. Quite the contrary ! He mitigates the responsibility, and visibly endeavours to give the impression that the large majority of the Sections remained faithful to the Convention. Ernest Hamel, who consulted the papers coming from the Section of the Pikes in the Archives of the Prefecture of Police, is convinced that Courtois said less than the truth. It was not at two in the morning, as he said, but as early as nine in the evening, that the general assembly of this Section met, and Hamel adds that “the assurance of the release of the proscribed deputies was welcomed there about eleven o’clock with demonstrations of joy ; they proposed to place the whole armed force of the Section at the disposal of the Commune, and the news of the tragic and unforeseen issue of the session of the General Council was all that occurred to chill their enthusiasm.”<sup>2</sup>

The minutes of the Civil Committee of the

<sup>1</sup> Courtois, *Rapport*, Floréal, Year IV, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire de Robespierre*, t. III, p. 778.

Section of the Pikes, which have survived, enable us to add more precise details.

A friend of Robespierre's, François-Pierre Garnier-Launay, a judge of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who lived at No. 736, Rue Caumartin, in the Section, was denounced on the 11th Thermidor by a certain citizen Robert, for his behaviour at the Jacobins two days previously. On the evening of the 9th he had introduced a motion at the Jacobins that a deputation should be sent to the Commune to request it to close all the gates of Paris, if they were not already closed. He had also proposed to keep up a constant correspondence with the Commune by means of hourly deputations. His propositions had been adopted. Then Garnier had betaken himself to the Civil Committee of the Section of the Pikes, and had tried to draw it into the rebellion. The minutes subsequently drawn up by the Civil Committee give the following account of his intervention :

“ Citizen Garnier-Launay came to the said Committee and said that it ought to give orders to part of the armed forces of the Section to guard the Commune, adding that this had just been said at the Jacobins, and that several Sections had already proceeded thither. The Committee, having listened to him, replied that it knew nothing of the Jacobins, so long as it had no orders from the Convention, and that it would give no orders to the armed forces.

Citizen Garnier-Launay listened to the reading of the Commune's letter announcing that liberty had been regained, and, in a postscript, that Robespierre was at liberty, and then asked for a copy of this letter to take to the Jacobins. The Committee refused. He persisted, saying that he would acquaint himself with its contents



in order to go on and communicate it afterwards to the Jacobins ; he repeated several times that he recognized in the signatories of this letter the Commune of August 10, and since the Committee persisted in its refusal to give him a copy of this letter, he asked that the original at least might be given him, which was likewise refused.”<sup>1</sup>

It seems as though these minutes, however much we may feel them to have been cooked, help us to make another step forward. Is not the letter from the Commune, the good news contained in which filled Garnier-Launay with enthusiasm, identical with the one which Moutonnet communicated to the Committees of the Convention on the next day, and of which Barère made use in his report ? This letter announced that “liberty had been regained” ; and such is the beginning of the famous document which Ernest Hamel regarded as a call to arms : “Courage, patriots of the Section of the Pikes, liberty is triumphing !”

The minutes of the Civil Committee add that the letter which Garnier-Launay wished to copy and take to the Jacobins announced “in a postscript” that Robespierre was at liberty. By this expression “postscript,” which doubtless need not be taken literally, may not the writer of the minutes have intended to allude to the abbreviated signature *Ro* at the foot of the document ? And was it not this syllable that aroused Garnier to enthusiasm ?

What is certain is that two letters from the Commune were sent on the morning of the 10th Thermidor by the Section of the Pikes to the Committees of Government. “The longer of the two,” says the entry of its despatch, “was

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4778.

the one bearing the sign-manual of Robespierre." It was surely this one of which Garnier-Launay asked for a copy.

The minutes, drawn up after his defeat, claim that the Committee repulsed the requests and advice of Robespierre's friend. But, according to Courtois' account, the attitude of the general assembly of the section was quite different. "If one were to believe what is to be found in the papers of the Jacobins and a note signed Moulin, this Section promised to fraternize with the Jacobins, which had become the accomplice of the rebels."

It is of little importance, however. Whatever opinion one may have of the degree of loyalty of the Section of the Pikes, the fact remains, and entirely demolishes the legend so readily developed by Ernest Hamel, and so blindly accepted by all those who have written since.

The letter to the Section of the Pikes which, as he would have it, Robespierre refused to sign for several hours, did not remain lying on the table of the Executive Committee of the Commune. It was not stained with Maximilien's blood. It reached its destination safely, but did not suffice to ensure the victory of the rebellious Commune.

But at what time was this letter written? At what time did it arrive at the Section of the Pikes?

When he was examined on the 18th Frimaire, Year III, by the judge Bidault, just before he was brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal with Fouquier-Tinville, Garnier-Launay declared that on the 9th Thermidor he left the Jacobins between nine o'clock and half-past nine in the evening, that he then went home, and afterwards to his Section. If we accept his declaration, it was

probably about ten o'clock at night that he must have appeared before the Civil Committee of his Section.<sup>1</sup> Now it was about the same time that the Commune determined to set up an Executive Committee.

The letter at the foot of which Robespierre signed the first letters of his name must have been one of the first written by the Executive Committee. It must have reached the Section of the Pikes some time between half-past ten and eleven o'clock; and this time corresponds exactly with the one given by the documents consulted by Ernest Hamel, which describe the explosion of joy produced at the assembly of this Section by the news of the release of the proscribed deputies.

Since this question of time is of the first importance, we must press the matter further.

In order to establish the chronological order of events, we have: first, the minutes of the General Council of the Commune, which began on the 9th Thermidor, "at half-past five in the evening," and ended with the breaking in of the troops of the Convention on the 10th Thermidor, "just on half-past two in the morning."<sup>2</sup> Except for these initial and final allusions, no time is mentioned in the body of the document, which simply gives us the sequence of facts. But in order to place these in relation to each other, we may utilize the many pieces of evidence scattered through the papers of the Sections, and, by this comparative method, it is open to us to attain comparative accuracy.

The first question to be cleared up is that of

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 80.

<sup>2</sup> This precious document has been published *in extenso* by Buchez and Roux in their *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution*, t. XXXIV, pp. 45-6.

knowing at what time the elder Robespierre appeared at the Commune and took his seat on the Executive Committee.

One thing is certain, namely, that he was preceded there by his brother Augustin.

The five deputies affected by the decree of arrest, the two Robespierres, Couthon, Saint-Just and Lebas, were first taken to the Committee of General Security—that is to say, to premises adjacent to the seat of the Convention. They had hardly arrived, about five o'clock in the afternoon, when Henriot, general of the National Guard, with his aides-de-camp, made an attempt to rescue them. Henriot kicked in the doors, but was soon surrounded by the gendarmes of the Tribunal, overpowered, bound and shut up in the same room as the deputies already arrested.<sup>1</sup> The usher to the Committee, Chevrillon, next conducted the deputies into the premises of the Secretariat, where he had dinner served to them. When dinner was over, about seven o'clock in the evening, they were each taken to a separate house of detention,<sup>2</sup> the elder Robespierre to the Luxembourg, the younger Robespierre to Saint-Lazare, then to La Force, Lebas to the prison of the departmental tribunal, Saint-Just to the Écossais and Couthon to La Bourbe.

But the police department of the Commune had already sent to all the door-keepers of the houses of detention the following order :

To the citizen door-keeper of the house of detention of. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Report of Joannolle, brigadier of gendarmerie, dated the evening of the 9th Thermidor (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432). Joannolle was head of the police guard of the Committee of General Security.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence given by Chevrillon, quoted by Courtois, p. 66, note. Order of the Committee of General Security. *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432.



We enjoin upon you, citizen, upon your responsibility, to take the greatest care that no letter or other papers enter or leave the house of which the care is entrusted to you, till further orders. You are to set aside carefully all letters which the prisoners hand to you.

You are similarly forbidden to receive any prisoner or to discharge anybody except by order of the police department.

HENRY LELIÈVRE, C. BIGANT, QUENEL, police commissioners.<sup>1</sup>

This order was not carried out by all the door-keepers. Though the one at the Luxembourg refused to receive Robespierre the elder, the one at the Écossais locked up Saint-Just, the one at the prison attached to the departmental tribunal took in Lebas and placed him in a separate cell; the one at La Bourbe took in Couthon, and, since it had no separate calls, set up a bed for him in the clerk's office. As for the younger Robespierre, he was turned away from Saint-Lazare for lack of room, and transferred to La Force, where he was locked up in turn.

The police commissioners, who were sitting in premises adjacent to the Mairie, a building at some distance from the Hôtel de Ville and situated along the Quai des Orfèvres, hastened to make arrangements to obtain the discharge of the prisoners.

They had no need to intervene in the case of the elder Robespierre. He had found at the door of the Luxembourg a municipal officer who cried shame on his escort, composed of two gendarmes and an usher of the Convention, for raising their hand against "the friend of the people." The

<sup>1</sup> See the declarations of the turnkeys appended to the *Rapport* of Courtois.

escort, having found the door shut, resolved to take Robespierre to the Mairie to ask for orders. Robespierre was received there with demonstrations of joy and cries of "Long live the Republic! Long live Robespierre!" The police commissioners made room for him in their midst. It was then about half-past eight. It was still daylight on that stormy July evening.<sup>1</sup>

A quarter of an hour later the younger Robespierre was rescued from the prison of La Force, and taken straight to the Hôtel de Ville by two police commissioners, accompanied by an armed force.

Lebas was kept longer in prison, because his gaoler, Blanchelaine, opposed a stubborn resistance to the police commissioners. Saint-Just was released about the same time. But Couthon did not leave La Bourbe (or Port Libre) till last of all, between midnight and one o'clock in the morning.<sup>2</sup>

Of the five proscribed members of the Convention, the younger Robespierre was the only one who went straight to the session of the Commune without requiring any persuasion. As soon as he arrived at the Hôtel de Ville he harangued those present: "Citizen Robespierre the younger," say the minutes, "made a speech in which he declared that he had been arrested, not by the Convention, but by some cowards who had been conspiring for five years. His speech met with hearty applause." Two witnesses who were present at the Commune, Guyot the municipal official, in an apology dated the 7th Fructidor, and the notable Fréry, who was examined on the 10th Thermidor by the Committee of Surveillance of the Section Guillaume-Tell, have handed down

<sup>1</sup> See the depositions of the servants of Lescot-Fleuriot, which confirm each other, in the *Rapport* of Courtois.

<sup>2</sup> Deposition of the door-keeper of Port-Libre, in *Courtois*.

to us the gist of what he said. Fréry, who happened to be in the great hall of the Commune between eight and ten o'clock at night, heard the younger Robespierre say "that the National Convention must be respected and treated with consideration, for if it ceased to exist we should be lost; but he complained of some members whom he named and designated as having been deceived by them up to the last moment, and congratulated himself upon being among men who desired the liberty and salvation of the people."<sup>1</sup>

Guyot, the municipal official, though unable to affirm whether the words he heard were spoken by the elder or the younger Robespierre, sums them up as follows: "He spoke of a faction which desired to enslave the people, slaughter patriots, open the Temple and bring out young Capet. He named the members of this faction: Collot d'Herbois, Bourdon of Oise, Amar, Dubarran, Rhul and two or three others, whose names I have forgotten; he mingled with this treacherous speech a eulogy on the National Convention, proved that the people would be lost if it separated from the Convention. (Wretch, who wast rallying against it the magistrates of the people!), but that the Convention was not that handful of factious persons whom he had just named, who borrowed the name of the Convention in order to make arbitrary arrests and proclamations fatal to liberty, etc., etc. He added, in proof of the spuriousness of an order or proclamation which had just been brought from the Committee of Public Safety, that David, whose signature had been falsely appended to it, was at that moment ill in bed."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Guyot's pamphlet is in the *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432. Many of the orders of the Committees which have been printed

It was in truth Robespierre the younger, and not the elder, who pronounced this adroit harangue, which aimed at distinguishing between the Convention and the leaders of the plot of Thermidor. Fréry expressly states that while he was present, between eight o'clock and half-past ten, Robespierre was not at the Commune, but was still at the police office, near the Mairie.

And even if we had not Fréry's testimony, the official Proceedings of the Commune would suffice to establish this fact. In this document, immediately after the mention of the younger Robespierre's speech, we read the following lines :

"The citizen mayor demanded that a deputation should be charged to go and fetch the elder Robespierre, and point out to him that he did not belong to himself, but ought to be wholeheartedly for the country and the people. It was demanded that commissaries should be appointed."

So Robespierre the elder, unlike his brother, had raised objections to going to the Hôtel de Ville. Legal scruples? Is this certain? Or was it rather tactics?

Robespierre remembered that Marat had also been brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal and had returned in triumph, and that his acquittal had been the signal for the speedy fall of the Gironde. Why should he not be as fortunate as Marat? Oral traditions collected by the earliest historians of the Revolution bear witness that the men of the Committees feared that their enemy would be acquitted. In refusing to re-

do actually bear the name of David. The order in question here is no doubt the one forbidding the commanders of legions to obey Henriot's orders.



ceive Robespierre in his prison, the door-keeper of the Luxembourg may have been not only obeying the orders of the police commissioners of the Commune, but carrying out the secret instructions of the Committee of General Security, which was anxious to have a pretext for outlawing a man whom it was risky to bring to trial.

However that may be, Robespierre was taken aback by the sudden rebellion of the Commune, which he had not foreseen. When he was brought to the offices of the police department he at first refused to leave them.

But this did not prevent him from advising his guardians. The police commissioners wrote to his dictation the following letter to Payan the national agent, published by Courtois :

“ We give you warning, citizen, that we think it urgent to close the city gates, if they are not closed ; that the post office should be seized, all the newspaper presses placed under seals, and that orders to this effect should be given to the police commissaries and the journalists arrested, as well as the traitorous deputies ; *it is Robespierre's opinion and ours*. Signed, TANCHON, FARO, E. BIGANT, QUENEL.”<sup>1</sup>

This significant letter must have been written very shortly after Robespierre's arrival at the police offices, for they were still unaware that the Commune had had the city gates shut. It does not, however, appear that the advice of the police commissioners, even backed up by Robespierre, was acted upon. I have nowhere seen that the Commune took possession of the post or the printing-works, nor that it laid violent hands upon the journalists.

<sup>1</sup> Document No. 13 appended to the *Rapport* of Courtois. The italics are mine.

The Commune at first confined itself to a defensive and waiting policy, whereas Robespierre in this letter recommended boldness and action. When it learnt that Henriot in his turn had been imprisoned on the premises of the Committee of General Security, it appointed a provisional general to take command in his place, Giot, an old dotard without initiative; it concentrated the gunners of the Sections with their cannon on the space before the Hôtel de Ville; finally, it charged Coffinhal to go and set Henriot free, with the aid of a detachment of gunners and mounted gendarmes.

It might have been nine o'clock at night,<sup>1</sup> when Coffinhal burst like a whirlwind into the premises of the Committee of General Security, carried Henriot off from his guards, and swept away in his train all the pickets guarding the Convention, down to the gendarmes attached to the tribunals. The Convention was left without defenders, at the mercy of Coffinhal and Henriot. The members of the Committee fled in dismay. "Citizens," cried Callot, who was presiding over the Convention, "now is the time to die at our post!" But instead of completing their operations, the victors confined themselves to bringing Henriot back to the Hôtel de Ville. Yet nothing would have been easier for them than to seize the members of the Committees and impose their will upon the terrified assembly. The lost opportunity never occurred again.

The news of Henriot's release reached the Commune almost immediately. It was at this moment that it decided to form an Executive

<sup>1</sup> "Towards nine o'clock at night," said Brigadier Joannolle (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432), "Towards about half-past eight at night," said the agent of the Committee, Longueville-Clémentière, in his pamphlet of Brumaire 17, Year III (*Archives nationales*, W. 79).

Committee of nine members, and that the younger Robespierre made his speech. When he had finished the Commune sent a delegation of six members to the Mairie to request the elder Robespierre to follow his brother's example and come and take part in its session.

On the way there Michel Lasnier,<sup>1</sup> the head of the delegation, met Henriot and Coffinhal returning along the quays. He asked them to join him. They consented. But all their efforts were fruitless ; they returned to the Commune without Robespierre. The failure of their mission is alluded to as follows, in some lines which have been struck out of the minutes.

" Citizen Lasnier, sent as delegate to Citizen Robespierre, who entrusted Coffinhal with . . . [sic] announces that Coffinhal is charged to confirm to the Council that he is being left in the hands of the administration."

Henriot and Coffinhal spoke after Lasnier. It was about ten o'clock.<sup>2</sup>

Robespierre's refusal was a cruel disappointment to the members of the Commune. Without Robespierre the insurrection lacked a leader.

What happened next ? How much longer did Robespierre continue to stay at the Mairie ?

If the minutes of the Commune are to be taken literally, he did not enter the Hôtel de Ville till about one o'clock in the morning, at the same time as Couthon, Saint-Just and Lebas.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lasnier gave an account of his mission before the General Assembly of his Section, the Proceedings of which refer to his words (Section of the Luxembourg, or Mucius Scævola).

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of Berger, of the Section of the Cité (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432).

<sup>3</sup> We read, in fact, about the last page but one of the minutes : " Robespierre, Couthon, Saint-Just, Lebas presented themselves before the General Council. They were greeted with hearty applause."

Couthon had followed the same reasoning as Robespierre. He had submitted to the decree of the Convention. He desired to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The insurrection took him by surprise. Two police commissioners came to him in prison and restored him to liberty. He dismissed them. The declaration of the door-keeper at La Bourbe declares that it was not till an hour after midnight that he left, after a fresh intervention on the part of the police commissioners.<sup>1</sup>

But the elder Robespierre had long since made up his mind to leave the Mairie for the Hôtel de Ville. If it is correct, as the official minutes state, that he did not appear at the session of the council of the Commune till after one o'clock in the morning, and accompanied by his colleagues, we must not conclude from this that he had so far stood aside. By the side of the great hall in which the Council was sitting there was another smaller one, set apart on ordinary occasions for the deliberations of the municipal body. It was in this room, called the Salle de l'Égalité, that the Executive Committee had been sitting since about half-past nine at night, and it was to the Salle de l'Égalité that Robespierre went almost immediately after the failure of the mission upon which Michel Lasnier had come to him, accompanied by Coffinhal and Henriot.

About half-past ten Citizen Chappin, a gunner of the Section of Bon-Conseil (that is to say, of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine), came and informed the Commune that the Committees were preparing to assemble the troops in order to surround the Hôtel de Ville and that a decree was going to be passed outlawing the

<sup>1</sup> Document No. 35 appended to the *Rapport* of Courtois.



leaders of the revolt.<sup>1</sup> The decisive hour had struck.

It was probably then that the Executive Committee sent Robespierre the following laconic note, which was published by Courtois<sup>2</sup>:

“The Executive Committee nominated by the Council is in need of your advice. Come at once. These are the names of the members: Châtelet, Coffinhal, Lerebours, Grenard, Legrand, Desboisseaux, Arthur, Payan, Louvet.

Signed, PAYAN, LESCOT-FLEURIOT, Mayor of Paris, MOENNE, Deputy-Mayor.”

This time Robespierre took the step. He came and took his place on the Executive Committee. It might have been between half-past ten and eleven o'clock at night.

There are several witnesses to his presence at the Hôtel de Ville from this time onwards. On the 10th Thermidor Citizen Camus, a member of the Commune, stated before the Committee of Surveillance of the Section of Guillaume-Tell that he had left the session of the Commune about midnight and had seen the two Robespierres, Lebas and Dumas there before his departure.<sup>3</sup> “The two Robespierres,” he added, “exhorted the people to uphold liberty.”

Juneau, the second-hand clothes dealer, stated on the 10th Thermidor, before the new police commissioners appointed by the Thermidorians,

<sup>1</sup> According to the papers of the Sections preserved at the *Archives nationales*, the outlawing of the Commune was known to the Section of the Luxembourg about eleven o'clock; to the Section of Bondy about midnight; to that of the Tuileries about half-past twelve; to the Bonnet-Rouge and Pont-Neuf about midnight, etc.

<sup>2</sup> In his first report (Nivôse, Year III), p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> *Archives nationales*, W. 79.

that on the evening before he had been struck in the great hall of the Commune, because he tried to protest when he heard the municipal officials pour contempt upon the Convention. He had at once been seized by an old gendarme, stripped of his arms and roughly handled. It was Robespierre who had proposed that he should be put in prison, and Robespierre had even shouted: "Knock him down! knock him down!"<sup>1</sup> Juneau did not state precisely at what time the incident occurred, but from the context it appears that it was about eleven o'clock.

Perhaps Juneau confused the younger Robespierre with the elder.<sup>2</sup> But now comes Longueville-Clémentière who, owing to his functions as agent of the Committee of General Security, had often had occasion to be near the two Robespierres and could not have taken one of them for the other. He tells us, in the apology for himself which he drew up on the 17th Brumaire, Year III, that, having gone to the Commune about one o'clock in the morning, he was recognized, seized by two gendarmes, and taken into the Salle de l'Égalité, where were Coffinhal, Henriot, Lebas and the two Robespierres. He does not mention either Couthon or Saint-Just.

In spite of the entreaties of the Commune, Couthon would perhaps not have consented to leave his prison had he not received the following appeal:

"Couthon, all patriots are proscribed, the whole people has risen; you will be betraying it

<sup>1</sup> Courtois, *Rapport* of Floréal, Year IV, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Yet we read in the Proceedings of the Section of the Invalides: "A member of the civil committee reported that he had come from the Commune, that he saw Robespierre there on the tribune, and that his speech revealed a culprit" (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432).

if you do not come and join us at the Commune, where we are at present.

(Signed) ROBESPIERRE THE ELDER, ROBESPIERRE THE YOUNGER, SAINT-JUST."<sup>1</sup>

The members of the Convention who had joined the Executive Committee did not wait for Couthon before they acted. Their first thought was to try and neutralise the action of the decrees and proclamations of the Convention in order to keep the Sections rallied round the Commune. I am convinced that the famous letter which they wrote to the Section of the Pikes was one of the first which they sent.

Lebas, who had had the École de Mars at the Camp of Les Sablons under his surveillance, wrote to his commandant Labretèche :

"A horrible plot has just come to a head. I am among the faithful representatives whom the conspirators have caused to be arrested. My suspicions as to the object of the camp are confirmed. It is for you to oppose the abuse of it to such a point that it is forced to commit suicide by marching under the banner of traitors. The eyes of the people are upon you ; they are determined to save themselves. Study to be faithful to it."

But letters did not amount to much. Direct action in the Sections seemed more desirable. The Executive Committee asked the General Council to select twenty-four of its own members who should execute its orders jointly with the Committee.<sup>2</sup> The Council placed twelve of its

<sup>1</sup> Second report of Courtois, p. 282. Courtois points out that this note is in the younger Robespierre's writing.

<sup>2</sup> The rough draft of this order is to be found in the *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4433.

members at the disposal of the Committee, and these twelve members immediately betook themselves to the Sections to check the defections which threatened since the decree outlawing the Commune had become known.<sup>1</sup>

The Executive Committee at last resolved to take the one step which might have been effective if it had been done in time, towards nine o'clock in the evening, when Robespierre had advised the police commissioners to do it ; it ordered the arrest of the members of the Committees directing the Convention.

“ The revolutionary Commune of the 9th Thermidor appointed by the people and for the people to save the country and the National Convention, attacked by base conspirators,

Orders that those by name Collot d'Herbois, Amar, Léonard Bourdon, Dubarran, Fréron, Tallien, Panis, Carnot, Dubois-Crancey [*sic*], Vadier, Javogne, Dubarran, Fouchet [*sic*], Granet, Moyse Bayle, be arrested, in order to deliver the Convention from the state of oppression in which they are keeping it.

The Council declares that it will give a civic crown to the generous citizens who shall arrest these enemies of the people ;

It declares that the same men who overthrew the tyrant and the Brissot faction will annihilate all the above-mentioned villains who have dared more than Louis XVI himself,

<sup>1</sup> These twelve citizens were Lacour of Brutus ; Mercier of Finistère ; Leleu of the Invalides ; Michel of the Quinze-Vingts ; d'Azard of the Gardes françaises ; Cochois of Bonne-Nouvelle ; Aubert of Poissonnières ; Barel of the Faubourg du Nord ; Gibert of the same Section ; Jault of Bonne-Nouvelle ; Simon of Marat ; and Gency of Finistère (Courtois, p. 111). The papers of the Sections describe the long and indecisive struggle which went on in each of them between the partisans of the Commune and those of the Convention, between midnight and two in the morning.



since they have placed the best citizens under arrest. PAYAN.”<sup>1</sup>

This order was supplemented by another in the following terms :

“ The revolutionary Commune, in the name of the safety of the people, orders all the citizens composing it to recognize no other authorities than itself, to arrest all those who abuse their position as representatives of the people, issue treacherous proclamations, and outlaw its defenders ;

It declares that all those who do not obey this final order shall be treated as enemies of the people.”<sup>2</sup>

But these vigorous resolutions, which were, moreover, made at the request of the Jacobins,<sup>3</sup> could not be executed. There was no time to enter them on the loose sheets of paper upon which the Secretary of the Council entered the minutes as they went along. They only exist in the form of rough drafts.

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F7, 4432. There is a first sketch of this order, also from the hand of Payan : “ The people desires to save the country, it desires to save the National Convention which can do (all) with the people and nothing without the people. It knows that the Convention has been deceived by traitors, by conspirators. The people accuses them, it demands their arrest, and will obtain it. This measure alone will save the Republic. These are the names of the conspirators : Collot d’Herbois, Barère, Amar, Léonard Bourdon. The people designates them, the people demands them. It is sovereign.”

It will be noted that the name of Barère, which appears in this first draft, has disappeared from the final text, but that several other names, on the other hand, have been added. We may wonder whether the disappearance of Barère’s name was not due to the influence of Robespierre, who had often defended him.

<sup>2</sup> Unsigned draft (*Archives nationales*, F7. 4433).

<sup>3</sup> This can be seen from the minutes of the Commune, in Buchez and Roux, t. XXXV, p. 55.

We know how the Executive Committee was engaged during the last moments after the arrival of Couthon, thanks to the depositions of the two gendarmes Muron and Javois, who accompanied the paralytic from La Bourbe to the Hôtel de Ville. "As soon as Couthon entered," they said, "three or four members seized hold of him, and two or three of them offered him ink and paper. Robespierre and Couthon said in an audible tone: *We cannot write to our armies in the name of the Convention or the Commune, for it would be intercepted, but rather in the name of the French people, and this would have far more effect*, and Couthon immediately began to write on his knees, saying: *Traitors shall perish, there are still humane beings in France, and virtue will triumph.*"

Robespierre took Muron the gendarme by the hand and said to them both: "Go down on to the *Place* at once and get people into the right frame of mind and keep up their spirits!"<sup>1</sup>

The deposition of the two gendarmes, which is absolutely contemporaneous with the events, is confirmed in an interesting fashion by the somewhat later testimony of an agent of the Committee of Public Safety for the manufacture of arms, H. G. Dulac, who had wormed his way into the Hôtel de Ville, he said, to do some spying for the benefit of the Convention. "The two Robespierres were [in the hall where it sat], one beside the President, Lescot-Fleuriot, and the other by Payan, the national agent. Couthon was carried in a moment later; and be it observed that he was still followed by his gendarme. On arriving, he was embraced by Robespierre, etc., etc., and they passed into the next room, where I made my way in. It was there that the first word I

<sup>1</sup> *Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432.

heard from Couthon was : ‘ *We must at once write to the armies.*’ Robespierre said : ‘ *In whose name ?* ’ Couthon replied : ‘ *Why, in the name of the Convention ; is it not always where we are ? The rest are only a handful of factious persons who will be scattered and have justice meted out to them by the armed forces which we have.*’ At this point the elder Robespierre seemed to reflect a little ; he stooped and whispered in his brother’s ear, then he said : ‘ *It is my opinion that we should write in the name of the French people.*’ At this moment, too, he took the hand of the gendarme, who had entered with Couthon, and said : ‘ *My good gendarme, I have always loved and esteemed your force ; always be faithful to us ; go to the door and act in such a way as to keep the people constantly exasperated against factious persons.*’<sup>1</sup>

These depositions are interesting, for they inform us that at that time, at one o’clock in the morning, the proscribed members of the Convention were beginning to draw up a proclamation to the armies. Not only did the elder Robespierre raise no objection, but he incited them to revolt. If he asked, with Couthon, in whose name the proclamation ought to be drawn up, it was not at all because he was afraid of infringing what was legal—the phrases reported cannot possibly bear a doubtful construction—but solely because he was looking for the best formula. There was not the slightest trace of hesitation or scruple.

<sup>1</sup> Dulac’s letter exists in two distinct forms, firstly, in that of a letter addressed to the Committee of General Security, and dated the 6th Frimaire, Year III (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432) ; and next, in the form of a letter addressed to Courtois, who published it in his report (p. 207). The latter is dated the 7th Thermidor, Year III. The variations between the two versions are unimportant.

But the gunners and National Guards assembled on the Grève since six o'clock in the evening were growing impatient at their long inaction. Many of them had not taken time to dine when the tocsin sounded. They were making merry in the neighbouring wine-shops. It was in vain that Henriot had a few quarts of wine distributed among them, and promised to compensate them for the time spent under arms. They kept wondering why they had been summoned. The emissaries of the Convention kept canvassing them, and the more timid or discontented of them were quietly slipping away. The officers conferred among themselves as soon as they heard of the decree outlawing the Commune and the deputies. Those of the Sections in which the partisans of the Convention were gaining the upper hand made haste to withdraw their men and guns unobtrusively. The Place de la Grève gradually emptied. When the Executive Committee noticed this, it gave orders for the front of the Hôtel de Ville to be lit up, in order to make it easier to keep them under observation. The defections went on. One of the last faithful battalions, that of Finistère, composed of journey-men, marched off in its turn towards two in the morning, to return to the Faubourg St.-Marcel.

At ten o'clock in the evening almost all the Sections had been represented by detachments massed before the Commune. On the other hand, there was hardly anybody in front of the Convention. At two in the morning the opposite was the case. The Commune was almost deserted, and the courts of the Tuileries were becoming filled with cannon and armed men.

When Léonard Bourdon presented himself before the Hôtel de Ville, at the head of a group of gendarmes and the battalion of Les Gravilliers,



which he had succeeded in bringing with him, he met with no more resistance in getting as far as the Salle de l'Égalité than Coffinhal had experienced a few hours previously in forcing the doors of the Committee of General Security. But Léonard Bourdon could only burst in as suddenly as this because his way was made easy by treachery. Ulrick, an aide-de-camp of Henriot's, had betrayed the pass-word of the troops of the Commune to Martin, *juge de paix* of the Section of Les Gravilliers, who told Léonard Bourdon.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to this pass-word, the troops of the Convention were able to get past all the guards without difficulty, by representing themselves as friendly troops.

We know what followed. Robespierre shot himself in the mouth with his pistol, but only succeeded in breaking a few teeth.<sup>2</sup> Lebas, who handled his weapon more surely, did not miss fire. Robespierre the younger, in despair at his brother's wound, threw himself out of a window into the Place, where he was picked up with a broken thigh. Saint-Just, stoical and disdainful, allowed himself to be led away without a word. Couthon wounded his head badly as he descended the staircase of the Mairie. Of the whole Commune, only Coffinhal and Lerebours succeeded in escaping, and Coffinhal was recaptured a few days later.

Robespierre the younger, who was still breathing, was carried on a chair to the Civil Committee of the Section of the Maison Commune. In reply to the questions put to him he answered that they had done him a very poor service in

<sup>1</sup> See the report of Courtois, p. 140, and the papers of the Section of Les Gravilliers (*Archives nationales*, F<sup>7</sup>, 4432).

<sup>2</sup> The theory of suicide has all contemporaneous testimony in its favour. Courtois adopted it. The story of the shot fired by Merda (or Méda) the gendarme is very dubious.

fetching him out of prison.<sup>1</sup> This final remark reveals to us the reason of these men's hesitations and lack of decision during the first moments of the insurrection.

They had not taken into account in their calculations this immediate and spontaneous revolt of the Commune and the Jacobins. The struggle in which they had joined against the Committees of the Convention was a parliamentary one, which they had thought to settle by parliamentary means. When, in the evening of the 8th Thermidor, Robespierre had come to read his last speech at the Jacobins, he only desired to obtain their moral support, which had hitherto been irresistible, as a preparation for the session on the morrow, at which he hoped to regain command of the majority. If he had believed the situation to be desperate from the parliamentary point of view, no doubt he would have acted differently. He was not a man who liked disorder, but neither was he a fool paralysed by legal scruples. He had prepared the events of August 10th openly, against the Legislative Assembly as much as against the King, laying down a programme for the insurrection, writing petitions for the *Fédérés* and calling upon the Jacobins to revolt. On May 31, likewise, he had himself issued the call to arms, and justified the ultimatum of the insurgents on the spot before the Convention. A year later, he was not so exhausted by parliamentary life and the practice of government as to have entirely shrunk from renouncing the use of this popular lever which he had twice handled with resolution and success. No! On the 9th Thermidor it was not legal scruples which stifled his initiative and paralysed

<sup>1</sup> Examination of Robespierre the younger in Courtois, *Rapport*, p. 205.

his will. He had mistaken the political situation. He did not believe that a coalition was possible between his enemies, the terrorists of the Mountain, and the moderates of the Plain, who had so far followed him. He had no knowledge of the plot which was hatched during the night. He put his confidence in the Convention. It did not occur to him that he could no more ascend the tribune where his eloquence had scored so many brilliant successes; he never imagined that his voice would be drowned by the President's bell and the clamour of the plotters, and that he would be placed under arrest by decree without being allowed to outline his defence.

After this surprise measure, he did not guess that the very news of his arrest would be enough to provoke the revolt of the Commune and the Jacobins as an immediate reaction from it. The previous insurrections in which he had taken part had all been prepared and announced beforehand. This one burst upon him like a thunderclap. At first he did not see its full extent and significance. And this is to a certain point explicable. While at the seat of the Committee of General Security had he not looked impotently on at the failure of Henriot's attempt to rescue him and his companions? Had Henriot not been pinioned before his eyes at five o'clock in the afternoon?

We may imagine the remarks which must have been exchanged between the five deputies while they were eating their meal at the Committee, before their departure to prison. They must then have agreed upon a common line of action. Henriot's failure seemed to leave them no hope of being rescued by force. They had no difficulty in making up their minds to a passive legal resistance, which had at least the advantage, they thought, of giving their partisans time to prepare

to avenge them. It was only gradually that they grasped the true situation, when they were fetched out of their prisons. But they were scattered. They could no longer come together and modify their former resolution by agreement.

When he was taken to the Mairie about nine o'clock in the evening, Robespierre durst not take it upon himself, in the absence of his companions, to break the tacit pact upon which they had agreed. But, as we have already seen, he inspired the police commissioners around him with those vigorous resolutions which would have saved the situation if they had been immediately adopted and applied by the Commune. But the attack which he suggested, the arrest of the members of the Committee, was set aside and adjourned. The Commune was quite ready to defend Henriot, Payan, or the proscribed deputies against the forcible measures of the terrorists. It did not yet dare to order that the Committees should be taken by storm. It was content to shield itself from their blows. It was not bold enough to forestall them when it was able to do so.

The decree of outlawry put an end to the indecision of Robespierre and the deputies who were his friends. One by one they betook themselves to the Executive Committee, in order to assume their responsibilities and try to save the movement, which was already in jeopardy. How could Robespierre have refused to send a syllable of encouragement to his faithful Section of the Pikes? I do not undertake to explain why his signature is abridged at the foot of the letter written by Lerebours. But of all the hypotheses which have been invented to account for it, the least admissible is the one which represents Robespierre as haunted by scruples of legality or by some unavowed fear. The letter to the Section of the



Pikes was sent off. It reached its destination early, certainly before eleven o'clock in the evening. This is the most patent conclusion from a careful examination of the documents. If Robespierre had had regrets after signing it, he would have struck out his signature, or he would have prevented its despatch. If he did nothing of the sort, then all the conjectures hitherto made as to his alleged hesitation are erroneous.

We can see, however, how the legend arose. It has been grafted on to the conversation which he had with Couthon at the time when the latter was beginning to draft a proclamation to the armies, which has not come down to us. "*In whose name?*" he said. But at once he answered: "*In the name of the French people.*" He was simply looking for the right formula, and he found it on the spot.

If he was beaten in the end, though he had in his favour the Jacobins, the large majority of the Sections and the Commune, the reason is that he committed an error of judgment. Although he was aware of his enemies' immorality and utter lack of scruple, he did not think it possible for them to carry the Assembly with them. Their bad reputation had even some share in blinding him. And when, surprised by events, he found himself a prisoner, he did not sufficiently reckon upon the power of his popularity to foresee the immediate revolt of the authorities of Paris. The arrest of Henriot, which took place before his eyes, finally confirmed him in this fatal illusion. From that time onwards he set all his hopes upon the Revolutionary Tribunal, and said to himself that he must gain time by a provisional submission. When he was undeceived, the absence and dispersion of his companions fettered his decision.

It was already too late when at last he went to the Executive Committee. There he threw himself whole-heartedly into the struggle. The vigorous resolutions which he had advised were already on paper when the treachery of a subordinate betrayed the pass-word to Léonard Bourdon, and enabled the troops of the Convention to make a surprise entry into the very room where he was deliberating.

He at least knew how to redeem his errors by a noble gesture. He did not want to fall into the hands of the triumphant "brigands" alive. And though in this, too, he was disappointed, the gesture remains. He had borne in mind something of those Romans whom his masters at the Collège Louis-le-Grand had taught him to admire in the *Conciones*.

## CHAPTER XI

### BUONARROTI'S ESTIMATE OF THE PART PLAYED BY BARÈRE AND VADIER ON THE 9TH THER- MIDOR <sup>1</sup>

THERE were two conspirators among those who hatched the dark *coup* of the 9th Thermidor, who played an important part: the chameleon-like Barère, ever ready to take the winning side, and the cold-blooded Vadier, a tortuous lawyer with a stone instead of a heart. At the Committee of Public Safety Barère did his best to protect the *Pourris*, the "rotten" clique <sup>2</sup> whose intrigues he dreaded. At the Committee of General Security, of which he was the president, Vadier led the attack and directed the first serious onslaught against the "Incorruptible," namely, the affair of Catherine Théot.

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires*, 1911, t. IV, pp. 96-102.

<sup>2</sup> The "pourris" were those deputies who profited by their official position to enrich themselves. Many of them had figured among the Dantonist party. Tallien had levied contributions upon the rich ship-builders of Bordeaux, whom he had put in prison and only let out upon payment of cash down. Barras and Fréron had behaved in the same way at Marseilles, Fouché at Lyons. Rovère and Poulthier had looted the national property during their mission to Vaucluse, where they had been the moving spirits of a set of speculators grouped together in a "black band." Merlin of Thionville, who was seen about with actresses, suddenly found himself rich enough to buy Mont Valérien and Le Raincy, near Paris. Courtois, the friend and relative of Danton, had speculated in army stores during his mission to the army of the North. We have seen above how Bernard of Saintes behaved at Montbéliard. Reubell had done some looting at Mainz, etc. All these "business deputies" were to band themselves together against Robespierre and form the nucleus of the Thermidorian party.

Vadier and Barère subsequently deplored the consequences of the 9th Thermidor. They had overthrown Robespierre out of fear, jealousy and desire for power. They had not imagined that they were overthrowing the Republic. Threatened during the Thermidorian reaction, accused of being terrorists by that same "rotten" set whom they had saved from the fatal tumbril, they began to examine their consciences.

In the Year IV Vadier entered into relations with the followers of Babeuf, most of whom were admirers of Robespierre. He was drawn into the Conspiracy of the *Égaux* [Equals] and imprisoned for three and a half years, with Buonarroti, on the Île Pelée, off Cherbourg. Later on, Buonarroti came upon him again in Belgium, with Barère, after the Restoration had driven the regicides into exile.

The three men were drawn together by their common misfortunes, and frequented one another's society. What can they have talked about, if not the past, that terrible past which formed at once a bond and a division between them?

As regards Robespierre, Buonarroti was absolutely uncompromising, and showed the others that he had not forgiven them for the 9th Thermidor. Barère, whom he met at the house of a M. Rodier in Brussels, was too supple and ready to forget, to take offence. He has left a pleasing sketch of Buonarroti in his Memoirs. Vadier, who was more irritable and vengeful, was annoyed by the praises of the "Incorruptible," and undertook to prove that his intentions on the 9th Thermidor had been pure. One day he handed Buonarroti a regular memorandum in justification of his conduct; Buonarroti kept it, studied it and felt impelled to examine his impressions of Vadier



and Barère in the following notes, which he wrote for his own eye alone<sup>1</sup>:

“ Here I am on friendly terms with Vadier, and, as a result, in contact with his friend Barère. Is this because I esteem them, is it because I see in them two steadfast supporters of liberty, two wise founders of the Republic? I am obliged to confess that in my eyes neither of them deserves this honour.<sup>2</sup>

These two men, who were involved in the proscriptions by which so many republicans were overtaken in the course of the Years II, III, and IV of the Republic, owed their misfortunes to the services which they had formerly rendered to the popular cause.

These two men are loathed by the royalists, whose idol they struck down, by the Girondins, whose leaders they accused, and by the Thermidorians, whose infamy and plots they refused to share.<sup>3</sup>

These circumstances were enough to determine me to seek their company in preference to that of nearly all their colleagues, who were the avowed enemies of the cause which I had defended.

There was another reason which attracted me

<sup>1</sup> Vadier's memorandum and Buonarroti's notes are to be found among the papers of the latter at the *Bibliothèque nationale, Fonds français*, new acquisitions, 20,804.

<sup>2</sup> These notes were written before Vadier's death (Note by Buonarroti).

<sup>3</sup> I refer to the plots which took place after the 9th Thermidor and tended to the utter destruction of democracy with a view to sharing the spoils of the Republic. As for the actual plot of which Robespierre and the people were the victims, Vadier and Barère were absolutely its authors or accomplices; these two men, with Collot, Billaud, Amar and Élie Lacoste, joined hands with their enemies the Dantonists to overthrow Maximilien; but so soon as he had been overcome, the struggle broke out once more between them and the immoral set, who ended by crushing them. (Note by Buonarroti.)

towards Vadier : this old man had been wrongfully implicated in the great Vendôme trial, and shared my captivity and deportation for three and a half years. I went to see him, as an old companion in misfortune, and the friendly reception which I received from him,<sup>1</sup> and particularly from his wife and daughter, induced me to repeat my visits, which finally became a daily habit. It was at Vadier's house that I often met Barère, and was able to form an idea of his talents, his knowledge, his philosophy and his character.

Barère is a great talker. His imagination is vivid, his political principles are unstable ; he loves pleasure and show, he likes to shine in the *salons* ; he is weak, irresolute, and excessively timid ; he is a great teller of anecdotes, true or invented.

Vadier is now no more than a dotard, but behind his chatter one can make out the sentiments by which he was guided in the course of the Revolution, in which he unfortunately played a great part.

Hatred of nobles, and scoffing at religion : these constitute Vadier's whole policy. He is fond of Equality, provided he enjoys a good income, can sell his wares for a high price, and has some influence in public affairs.

At the time when Vadier was cutting a brilliant figure in the world it was considered the right thing to make fun of all religious ideas, and even to make a parade of Atheism ; Vadier therefore bases his whole philosophy upon impiety,

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, half friendly on Vadier's part ; true friendship and warm-heartedness I found in his wife. Shortly after our meeting Vadier was seized with a fit of avarice, and, fearing lest I might ask them for money, he hastened to announce to me, without anything to lead up to it, and with no provocation, that the state of his fortunes made it impossible for him to help me. (Note by Buonarroti.)

and sees no cause for the tyranny which is now crushing France and the whole of Europe but the influence of religious ideas.

The opinions of Vadier are brought to light when he has to pronounce an opinion upon the merits of Rousseau and Voltaire; he delights in the frivolity, irreligion and immorality of the latter, while rejecting the religious, moral and political principles of the former as paradoxes. Vadier can see nothing but imposture and tyranny in an alliance between a sensible religion and good laws; and his prejudices in this matter are so strong that he would prefer the most immoral licence to that virtue which is in conformity with belief in God and in the immortality of the soul. He fears death, but affects to defy it; he is scared of danger, but he wants his courage to be admired.

These two men, who value themselves upon their patriotism, and parade their incorruptibility in all that they say, had both of them a great share in the events which arrested the advance of the Revolution and dug the grave of liberty.

What leads me to judge them in this way are public events, their own admissions, and the knowledge which I have of their principles and character.

When, in Year II of the Republic, royalty and the bourgeois aristocracy, of which the Girondins were the leaders, had been struck down, all that was left to do was to complete the annihilation of the factions opposed to Equality, and to give France such institutions as should lay a solid foundation for the liberty and sovereignty of the People.

In order to attain this double end, it was necessary to persevere in the severity shown to the enemies of the Revolution, and to repress the

immorality which was making great progress at that time among a numerous class of citizens.

The new régime, of which the foundations were scarcely laid, had not yet succeeded in generally substituting that pure and free morality which ought to arise from good laws and judicious education, for the insidious curb formerly placed upon the inordinate passions of men by the ancient laws and religious opinions.

While to some all the sacrifices necessary to the achievement of public regeneration were rendered easy by a love of true glory, others saw in the upheaval of the old social order no more than an opportunity for claiming the advantages formerly enjoyed by the great and rich, and for abandoning themselves with impunity to excesses of every sort.

It was thus that some spurious republicans presumed to act dishonestly towards alleged aristocrats, that others enriched themselves by an abuse of their public functions, that matrimonial fidelity was violated in order to sate a lust for wealth, and that acts of personal revenge were committed under the pretext of frustrating the plots of the public enemies.

These criminal actions were instigated and justified at the time by the preaching of a lax morality, which had its apostles in the very heart of the National Convention, where it gave rise to falsification of decrees,<sup>1</sup> embezzlement,<sup>2</sup> the shielding of *émigrés*,<sup>3</sup> and the betrayal of State secrets.<sup>4</sup>

Fresh encouragement was afforded to these abuses by the efforts which were made to erect Atheism into a national dogma. They tended to nothing less than to disgust people with virtue, and enervate their spirit by the love of pleasure,

<sup>1</sup> The allusion is to Chabot, Delaunay of Angers, Julien of Toulouse.

<sup>2</sup> Perrin of Aube, Courtois, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Osselin, Danton.

<sup>4</sup> Hérault de Séchelles, Thibaudeau.



to spread general corruption, and to revolt the people by outraging their beliefs, and making them dismayed at the oppression which would have weighed heavy upon them in consequence of the outburst of vice and crime of which they had so many examples before their eyes.

At that period the most powerful enemy which remained to be fought against was immorality ; and the greatest and only means at hand for establishing the true Republic upon solid foundations was the purity and virtue of the National Convention. It was therefore incumbent upon those in charge of the destinies of France, who sincerely desired the triumph of equality, to maintain this purity and virtue, and above all the estimation in which it was important that it should be held."

In view of Buonarroti's accusations, it is only fair to give an abstract of Vadier's apology.

Vadier justifies himself by claiming that he did no more than place himself in a position of legitimate defence. The attack, he maintains, came from Robespierre, who had set up a triumvirate with Couthon and Saint-Just, and separated himself from the governing Committees of the Convention. Vadier forgets that the affair of Catherine Théot, which he set in motion against Robespierre, dated from just after the festival of the 20th Prairial, and that it was not till after this savage and treacherous onslaught that Robespierre relaxed his assiduity at the Committee of Public Safety.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vadier admits this himself at the end of his memorandum : " We know that this comico-fanatico-religious farce was followed very closely by the split which arose in the Committee of Public Safety owing to the absence of Robespierre, who left in order to form his triumvirate with his associates Couthon and Saint-Just " (Robiquet, p. 324).

Vadier adds—and this is a better reason than the previous one—that, by organizing the police board of the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre had usurped the functions of the Committee of General Security, and “rendered them ineffectual by thwarting them.” We ought to know exactly on what grounds this police board was organized, and whether it really worked in opposition to the Committee of General Security. This is a point to be studied.

Vadier maintains that the triumvirs, once master of the police board, brought charges against those citizens whom the Committee of General Security had set at liberty, and, conversely, released those who had been arrested by the Committee’s orders. We cannot decide this point except by a minute examination of the registers of the Committee and of the police board, and by enquiring into the political antecedents of those arrested and released. A thankless but indispensable piece of research.

One thing to be noted is that Vadier, like Robespierre himself, believed that foreign agents played a part in all the great crises of the revolution, in the fall of the Girondins and the Dantonists, as in the Thermidorian reaction.

The reaction of Thermidor ! He cannot speak of it without horror and dismay : “From that date started the country’s misfortunes, with which my own were bound up.”

Vadier agrees that it was his report upon the affair of Catherine Théot which made him suspect to Robespierre, that same Robespierre before whom he had previously burnt incense ! “That hypocrite,” he says, “regarded this part of my report [on Catherine Théot] as a covert stab at his nascent despotism, and from that time onwards treated it as an affair of the first

importance." But why did Vadier give Robespierre this "covert stab"? Only two reasons presented themselves to his memory. He accused Robespierre of encroaching upon his functions by his police board, and above all, he blamed him for the Festival of the Supreme Being. In the last analysis it was anticlerical fanaticism as much as, or more than jealousy, which drew Vadier into the plot culminating in the 9th Thermidor. We can understand how it was that, while judging him hardly, and condemning his cold-heartedness severely, Buonarroti none the less did not hesitate to put his hand into that of such a man. It was not stained with blood and rapine like those of so many others among the judges of Thermidor.

## CHAPTER XII

### BABEUF AND ROBESPIERRE<sup>1</sup>

THE first French Socialists to form a party, the *Égaux* (Equals) whom we now know as *Babouvistes*, from the name of their leader, professed a regular veneration for Robespierre. They gave themselves out, both to their contemporaries and to posterity, as his heirs and successors. We have already, on various occasions, laid stress upon this historical truth, which is too often unrecognized. We do not think it superfluous to return to it on this occasion with still further proofs.

It must not be supposed that Gracchus Babeuf sheltered his communism behind the great name of Robespierre, after the event, out of tactics and the adroitness of a politician!<sup>2</sup> No! Babeuf was an old admirer of Robespierre's. He expressed himself on this point in the clearest terms in an intimate letter which he wrote to his friend, the deputy Coupé of Oise, on September 10, 1791<sup>3</sup>: "Analyse Robespierre," he said to Coupé, "and you will find him too, in the last resort, an agrarian, and these great men are obliged to manœuvre, because they feel that the time is not yet ripe."

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in the *Annales révolutionnaires* for May 1917.

<sup>2</sup> See our articles: *La Politique de Robespierre et le 9 Thermidor expliqués par Buonarroti* (*Annales révolutionnaires*, 1910, t. III, pp. 480. 513); *La politique sociale de Robespierre* (*Annales révolutionnaires*, 1913, t. VI, pp. 551-63).

<sup>3</sup> This long and very interesting letter was published for the first time by M. Espinas in his *La Philosophie sociale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 410.



"Agrarian," at that date, meant in favour of the agrarian law, that is to say, communist. The word Socialist was not yet invented.

So Babeuf had "analysed" Robespierre, and found that the lines on which his social ideas ran were the same as his own. He was grateful to the barrister from Arras for having always undertaken the defence of the people and the disinherited from the tribune of the Constituent Assembly, for having opposed the distinction between active and passive citizens, for having protested against martial law, denounced the abuses of the allotment of the communal lands, demanded a just division of inherited property, and upheld on all occasions the claims of humanity against those of bourgeois law.

When, in the spring of 1792, the hunger riots caused by the excessive rise in the price of commodities broke out, when the insurgents in the Beauce massacred Simoneau, the wealthy Mayor of Étampes, whom the Feuillants, and even the Jacobins, treated as a martyr—the martyr of Law—to whom did Pierre Dolivier, parish priest of Mauchamp, turn, when he was defending the peasants who had been arrested and brought to justice? To Robespierre, who inserted his petition in No. 4 of his *Defender of the Constitution*, and who, almost alone in the whole of the Press, attacked the idol of the day, the dogma of economic liberty. It required some courage to write publicly, in a signed article, only a few days after the funeral processions celebrated throughout the whole of France in honour of the Mayor of Étampes, the following words :

" Well ! I declare that Simoneau was no hero, but a citizen generally regarded in his part of the country as a greedy speculator in the food

of the people, keen to bring to bear upon his fellow-citizens a terrible power which humanity, justice and even the law forbid to be lightly exercised<sup>1</sup>; he was guilty before he became a victim, and the misfortunes of his country, and the violence for which his fellow-provincials are blamed, were to a large extent his doing. . . .”

If these lines of Robespierre's met Babeuf's eyes and—it is impossible to doubt this, for Babeuf and Dolivier knew each other<sup>2</sup>—the Picard expert on feudal rights must have been pleased with the barrister of Artois.

Was Babeuf personally acquainted with Robespierre? The published documents do not permit us to answer in the affirmative. But it would not have been impossible. He came to Paris in the spring of 1793, to escape the persecutions to which he was subjected in the department of Somme. His friend Sylvain Maréchal found him a post in the Food Control Department of the city of Paris, and afterwards got him employment with Prudhomme on the *Révolutions de Paris*. Sylvain Maréchal, who was politically rather an eclectic, was in agreement with Babeuf's social programme. Babeuf may have heard Robespierre develop at the Jacobins his famous declaration of the rights of man, in which he defined property as “that portion of goods guaranteed by the law!”

However that may be, Babeuf was not concerned in the inner struggles of the Mountain. He was arrested for the first time on the 24th

<sup>1</sup> Robespierre alludes to Simoneau's proclamation of martial law. He censures him for having ordered the troops to fire on the starving people.

<sup>2</sup> Among Babeuf's papers at the time of his arrest, under the Directory, was found Dolivier's chief work, the *Essai sur la justice primitive*.

Brumaire, and for the second time on the 11th Pluviôse, for the forgery which he committed on the register of the sale of national property in the district of Montdidier;<sup>1</sup> and he spent the tragic period of the Terror in prison. M. G. Deville, who is far from favourable to Robespierre, has already refuted the legend which alleges that Babeuf was among those who reviled Maximilien at the Festival of the Supreme Being. Released on bail on the 30th Messidor, he was at Laon on the 9th Thermidor, when the "Incorruptible" was succumbing beneath the blows of intrigue and crime.

On his return to Paris soon after this great event, Babeuf's one idea was to turn it to the advantage of the democratic cause. He became a member of the People's Society, which held its meetings in the hall of the Electors at the Évêché, and at which the most advanced elements of the old Jacobin party met together. As early as the 30th Thermidor he was demanding the liberty of the Press and the restoration to the people of the right to elect the authorities. In other words, he was demanding an end of revolutionary government and a return to a normal and constitutional regime. Superficial and prejudiced historians conclude from this that, in doing so, Babeuf was professing views in opposition to those of Robespierre. These historians, who confuse Robespierre with the Terror, have never read the speech of the 8th Thermidor, or, if they have, they have not understood it, for this speech, which forms Robespierre's testament, is one long cry of protest against terrorism and its abuses.

<sup>1</sup> M. Gabriel Deville, who discovered the papers bearing on the case, believes in Babeuf's innocence. M. M. Dommanget, who reopened the question, considers that forgery was actually committed, but that Babeuf's intention was disinterested.

Being a journalist, and having to reckon with public opinion, Babeuf was no doubt obliged, in the paper which he founded on the 17th Fructidor, Year II, to disown Robespierre, and dissociate himself from such a compromising name. But only see the terms in which he does it! "We will esteem and admire the work [the Declaration of Rights of 1793]," he says in the first number of this paper, "and we will forget who was the worker, a sincere patriot and friend of principles up to the beginning of 1793, but since that time the most arrant villain." Such a way of forgetting Robespierre, while at the same time recalling his fairest title to fame, is a piece of adroitness which leaves us undeceived as to Babeuf's true sentiments.

It is true that, in the following numbers, he violently attacked Carrier, but who, if not Robespierre, had caused the bloody proconsul to be recalled?

In the very pamphlet in which he assailed Carrier he was most careful to insert the following passage, in which he proclaimed his solidarity with Robespierre's social policy :

"I have no intention," he said, "of censuring that part of Robespierre's plan which relates to the subsidy levied upon the rich for the benefit of the children and relations of the defenders of the country. I do not even censure the institutional measures which have as their object to bleed the child of fortune in order to reward these same defenders on their return from the fight. . . . It would be in no wise just that he who has nothing should expose himself and sacrifice himself in order to defend property for the benefit of those owning it. . . . I will go further, and (*even if this opinion might appear to resemble*



*the system of Robespierre*) I would say that, whether one is a combatant or not, the soil of a State ought to ensure subsistence to all members of that State. I say that when, in a State, a minority of members of society has succeeded in monopolizing all wealth, landed or industrial, and by this means keeps the majority under its rod, and uses the power which it possesses to make them languish in want, we must recognize that this encroachment can only have taken place under cover of bad institutions of government. And in that case, the present administration ought to do what the old administration failed to do in past days, to prevent abuses or stifle them at birth, and so restore the balance which should never have been lost. . . . The authority of the law ought to bring about a reaction in the direction of an ultimate condition of improved government according to the *Contrat social*: namely, that all should have enough and nobody should have too much. If Robespierre saw this, then, in this respect, he had the true lawgiver's eye."

M. Espinas, who quotes this passage, is quite right in saying that the few commonplace taunts uttered against the name of Robespierre in the same article ought not to mislead us as to Babeuf's true way of thinking.

Further, in his twenty-fourth number, Babeuf is emboldened to denounce the hypocrisy of those who were masters at the time, the Thermidorians, who speak of the revolutionary government "as of the holy of holies, with veneration and respect, and of Robespierre's government, the Terror and its systematic bloodshed, with indignation, as if all that were not one and the same thing." No, Babeuf was not deceived by the indignation of the Thermidorians!

Can anybody be surprised if the famous Guffroy, the enemy of Robespierre, who acted as Babeuf's printer, found that such truths were better left unsaid, and requested this dangerous man to take his papers to some other press ! A few days later Babeuf was arrested and locked up at the Luxembourg for a week (November 1794).

From that time onward he never ceased to denounce, in the *Tribun du Peuple*, the rising tide of reaction. Henceforward he used the same expressions about knaves as Robespierre had done in his speech of the 8th Thermidor. The suppression of the maximum, and the horrible famine which resulted from it, made people regret the good times in Robespierre's day. Babeuf could go ahead. He felt himself supported. In his twenty-ninth number, dated from the 1st to the 19th Nivôse, Year III (December 21-January 8, 1795), he defined the two parties into which the republicans were divided in a passage which Robespierre might have signed :

“I can distinguish two parties, diametrically opposed to each other. . . . I am prepared to believe that both of them desire the Republic, but each of them wants it in its own way. One party desires it to be bourgeois and aristocratic ; the other considers that it has brought the Republic into being, and that it should remain entirely popular and democratic. . . . The former party desires that the Republic should include both patricians and plebeians. . . . The second party desires for all not only equality before the law, equality on paper, but also an honourable competence, a generously assured sufficiency of all physical necessities and social advantages, a just and indispensable recompense for that

complement of work which each one furnishes for the common task."

A warrant for the arrest of Babeuf was issued on the 12th Nivôse. He escaped from it by flight. A fresh order for his arrest was issued a month later, the 17th Pluviôse. This time Babeuf was put in prison, first in Paris, at La Force and Les Orties, then at Arras, at Les Baudets, where he arrived on the 25th Ventôse (March 15, 1795). At Les Baudets he entered into relations with the principal agitators who were to form, with him, the nucleus of the Conspiracy of the *Égaux*, and especially with Germain. Brought back to Paris, to Le Plessis, on the 24th Fructidor, Year III (September 10, 1795), he did not stay there long.<sup>1</sup> The amnesty which followed the 13th Vendémiaire restored him to liberty.

As soon as he resumed publishing his newspaper, at the beginning of the Directory, he openly proclaimed himself a Robespierrist. "Let us dare to say," he wrote in his thirty-fourth number, which appeared on the 15th Brumaire, Year IV (November 6, 1795), "that in spite of all obstacles and opposition, the Revolution kept advancing up to the 9th Thermidor, but, since then, has gone back." There has been an attempt to assert that he was converted to Robespierism in prison, by associating with such men as Duplay, Debon, Darthé and Germain, by whom his opinions may have been modified. There is no need to have recourse to this explanation. Babeuf never varied in his social ideas, which, as early as 1791, had drawn him close to Robespierre. His conversion must have been easy,

<sup>1</sup> Just long enough to get to know Debon, "who had grasped Robespierre's profound views better than anybody" (Buonarroti, *Conspiration pour l'Égalité*, t. I, p. 70, note).

if conversion it was ; for in spite of his friendship with Sylvain Maréchal, he had never been a Hébertist. As early as his third number, at a time when, out of tactics, he appeared to applaud the 9th Thermidor, he had repudiated Hébertism.

It was in his fortieth number, which appeared on the 5th Ventôse, Year IV (February 24, 1796), that he developed his Robespierrist confession of faith at the greatest length.

He began by publishing the following letter, which he had received, he said, from a captain in the Army of the West :

*Letter to the Tribune coming from the Army of  
the West*

“In several departments, my dear Gracchus, men are talking of nothing but turning your advice to advantage. I have just made a long journey, and I have found on all sides a complete disgust with all that has been done for eighteen months past. The People, sunk in gnawing poverty, persecuted and downtrodden by the class of ‘nice people,’ exclaims, when it sees the assignats which no tradesman will accept : ‘That was worth money eighteen months ago. That man Robespierre must have been very clever to be able to keep it at par.’ And then they deal with Tallien, Fréron, Rovère, the dominant party of Prairial, and their like, according to their works. . . . It is true that royalism, with its usual adroitness, tries to insinuate that all we are suffering from to-day is caused by nothing but the Revolution. Fools believe this, and imagine they would be happier under the yoke of a master. But the majority can well say that it is more profitable to re-establish the Republic than to restore a tyrant to the throne. Finally, my dear Tribune, if it is possible to rouse the



Parisians, I can answer for the departments, and above all for the armies. Oh, the armies ; yes, yes, I answer for them. Nobody will get the brave defenders of our country to believe that the present government is the best possible. When they compare the respect with which they were treated under the rule of the Terror, the care that was taken for their well-being, the reason they were given to feel encouraged, and, lastly, the state of their *moral* at that time ; when, I say, they compare all this with the degrading state to which they are reduced nowadays, they are ready to cry out with one voice : *Give us back Robespierre's government.* Indeed, nothing could be more dismal than the life of the soldiers. Their assignats are refused, and they have not even enough cash to buy snuff. They are contemned, flouted and dragged before the tribunals for the slightest thing. In conclusion, let an appeal but be made to the soldiers, and every army will become the centre of a *Republican Vendée*."

(Signed) B——, Captain of Sappers.

Encouraged by his correspondent's letter asserting that the army regretted Robespierre, Babeuf in turn explained his views in a long note which deserves to be reproduced at length :

" It is the moment when, as at Rome after the death of Manlius and the two Gracchi, every street and open space rings with the echoes of tears and bitter regrets at the murder of this noble plebeian : it is this moment, I say, which a complaisant advocate of the party of Thermidor must needs choose to pour out a flood of malice and venom upon the memory of the immortal victims of that fatal day. Vilain d'Aubigny, the

notorious ex-under-secretary at the ministry for war, is the man to whom we refer. He had written a thick book in the reactionary vein, at a time when it was the fashion to write in favour of the "glorious" revolution of Thermidor. It might have been possible to forgive him, if he had been satisfied to make one distribution at the time. But the new edition which he has just distributed in profusion points to some special intention. There is an obvious desire to create a diversion from the well-justified tears which the People are shedding upon the tomb of their best and sincerest friends. There is a wish to bamboozle them by endeavouring to divert these regrets to the memory of Danton. What a difference between Danton, the protector of all those zealous for the Republic of the rich, and those whose every act and speech breathed nothing but love of the real People and of Equality! Danton loved the Republic after the fashion of the butcher Legendre, his intimate friend. He desired it in order to set the men of the Revolution in the place of the princes and noble lords, in order to give Le Rincy to Merlin of Thionville and Messalina-Comtat<sup>1</sup> to the above-mentioned butcher: 'At any rate,' these villains would say to one another, repeating their master's words, 'we are as good as d'Artois and d'Orléans.' 'Yes,' Danton kept insisting, 'every man in his turn. The Revolution is for those who made it. The revolutionaries must take the place of those whom they have overthrown: like these, let them have gold, property, lands, palaces, beautiful courtesans and every pleasure put together.' Was this the gospel of the philosopher of Arras? Listen to him in his sublime speech of the 17th Pluviôse, Year II, and you will recognize

<sup>1</sup> The actress Comtat, the mistress of Legendre.

in him a different way of characterizing the object of the Revolution : *'We desire,' said he, 'a state of affairs in which the Country shall guarantee the prosperity of every individual, and in which every individual shall proudly rejoice in the prosperity and glory of the Country.'* And this is the man who, at the moment when the whole Nation is recovering from the mistake into which it has fallen with regard to him, is attacked by this person Vilain d'Aubigny, acting on behalf of the sybarites of the day. What arguments are used for the purpose of indicting him ? What legitimate grounds of incrimination can he bring to bear against the young and wise St. Just, whom he is rending with equal ferocity ? See what he is casting up against them both ! A wretched hash-up of the same vile falsehoods as were lavished on them during the months after Thermidor, which one imagined to be absolutely worn-out since then. Urn of Robespierre ! Beloved ashes ! Spring once more to life, and deign to confound your grovelling slanderers. But no ! disdain them, ye precious remains, and rest undisturbed ! The whole French people, whose happiness you desired, and for which your genius alone did more than anyone else—the whole French people is arising to avenge you. And you, author of the sacrilegious pamphlet which gives you pause, learn to have more respect for the memory of a sage, a friend of the human race, and a great lawgiver ! And refrain from insulting one whom posterity will venerate. And you, Patriots, who have had the disgusting libel which I am trying to refute almost forced into your hands to make you accept it, what ought you to do with it ? Can I believe that you will hesitate to leave it weltering in the sewers ? ”

Having disposed of the dismal Vilain d'Aubigny in this fashion, Babeuf carries his stirring apology for Robespierre still further :

“ Democrats are not pleased to hear the Constitution of '93 referred to in slighting terms ; they do not, moreover, regard it as exclusively the work of Hérault de Séchelles. While agreeing with the writer of *L'Opinion* that that code had not yet set up or guaranteed the highest pitch of happiness for society, I am none the less bound to admit that it was a great step in that direction. It was a solid basis, a foundation-stone upon which appeared in outline the complete design for a perfect structure of Equality. All its elements, the means for perfecting it, were contained and indicated in the plan itself ; and it is because he saw this too clearly that our enemies spared no sacrifices in order to overthrow him. We may even see, in the ordering of this fine work, the application of a tendency as great as it was bold and philanthropic, which had long been nourished in the soul of Maximilien Robespierre. In one of the numbers of his valuable paper he blames Solon for only desiring to make laws *as little bad as the People for whom they were intended could accept* ; and he added that *true lawgivers ought not to subordinate their laws to the corrupt morality of the People for whom they are destined ; but they ought to be able to restore the morality of the People by their laws, first to base these on justice and virtue, and then to know how to surmount every difficulty in order to impose them upon men*. Such, I repeat, is the intention which is to be perceived in the Constitution of '93, the principles of which are far more pure than was the French people which adopted it, even at the time when it was published. Never-



theless, those who drafted this Constitution did not carry Robespierre's maxim into effect in its entirety ; doubtless because they none the less judged it imprudent to do so, and thought they would arrive more surely at the highest pinnacle of justice by gradual degrees. Their intentions, as I believe, were wholly directed towards this, and I will not consent to tax them with *ignorance and hypocrisy*. This advance by easy stages might not have been a bad thing. They had already gone a long way. It is true that it allowed too much time for seeing the direction in which they were going, and cutting off their advance. But who can answer for it that he who wishes to travel post will not smash his carriage by falling over some steep precipice ? Let us not revile others who desired what was good, but claimed to approach it by a different road from our own. When Michel Le Pelletier produced his plan for Common Education, he too was tending towards Equality. Robespierre was going the self-same way when, on April 21, 1793, he earned at the Jacobins the well-earned applause and ardent enthusiasm of the real People, on presenting to them his Declaration of the Rights of Man, in which *Property* was defined as follows : *the right of the citizen to the enjoyment of such a share of goods as shall be guaranteed him by law ; a right limited by the obligation of respecting the rights of all his other co-partners, without the power of doing any damage to their security, liberty, existence and property*. This definition was my Manifesto and this statement of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was certainly not the work of a hypocrite. Such an epithet may suit those who have changed this same definition and substituted for it the following equivocal one : *that Property is the right to dispose at will of the*

*fruits of one's industry, etc.* Robespierre's Declaration of Rights underwent none but this essential variation, after which we saw it appear almost word for word at the head of the Constitution of '93. Thus mutilated, no doubt it was no longer my Manifesto. All the same, it is not for me to set up on these grounds to compete with Maximilien Robespierre for having initiated during the Revolution the plan of true Equality, towards which alone, in a hundred passages in his works, he proves that his wishes tended. Such is the justice which I have thought it my duty to do to this tyrant, whose property and effects have just been sold by order of the State, fetching (at the beginning of Pluviôse) a price of thirty thousand francs in the national currency, three hundred livres cash ! . . ."

Five days after issuing this fortieth number, in which he placed his own doctrine under the ægis of Robespierre and Saint-Just, and declared himself, like them, the enemy of Danton and his like, Babeuf gave a clear exposition of his intentions in an intimate letter to his friend Bodson, of which it may not be amiss to reproduce the most important passage :

"I freely confess to-day that I am vexed with myself for having formerly taken an unfavourable view of the Revolutionary Government, Robespierre and Saint-Just. I believe that these men alone were worth more than all the revolutionaries put together, and that their dictatorial government was a devilish good idea. All that has happened since these men and their government ceased to exist is perhaps a sufficient justification of this assertion. I do not at all agree with you that they committed great crimes and caused

the death of many republicans. Not so very many, I think ! I will not enter into an enquiry as to whether Hébert and Chaumette were innocent. Even if that were the case, I should still justify Robespierre, for it was he who might justly pride himself upon being the only man capable of guiding the chariot of the Revolution to its true goal. It is possible that our Robespierre perceived that there were some busybodies, some men, in his opinion—and perhaps also in reality—prepared only for half-measures, men like this, I say, greedy of fame and full of presumption, who were desirous of competing with him for the control of the chariot. Even this man of initiative, this man who must have been conscious that he was the only capable leader, must have seen that all these ridiculous rivals, however good their intentions may have been, would trammel and spoil everything. I suppose him to have said : ‘ Let us cast all these intrusive triflers under the extinguisher, good intentions and all ’ ; and to my mind he was right. The salvation of 25,000,000 men cannot be weighed in the balance against consideration for a few shady individuals. A regenerator should take broad views. He must mow down all that impedes him, all that cumpers his path, all that might hinder his safe arrival at the goal he has set before him. Knaves or fools, presumptuous or greedy for fame, it is all the same thing, and so much the worse for them ! What are they doing there ? Robespierre knew all this, and it is partly this which makes me admire him. This is what makes me see in him the genius in whom resided truly regenerative ideas ! . . .

I do not yet, in common with you and like you, believe that it is impolitic and superfluous to evoke the ashes and principles of Robespierre

and Saint-Just to bolster up our doctrine. In the first place, we are doing no more than render homage to a great truth, without which we should fall too far short of due modesty. This truth is that we are but the second Gracchi of the French Revolution. Is it not a good thing to show that we are no innovators, that we are no more than the successors of the first generous defenders of the people, who had laid down, before us, the same goal of justice and happiness as that which the people ought to attain?

In the second place, to revive Robespierre would be to revive all the active patriots of the Republic, and, with them, the people who once listened to and followed none but them. Let us pay this legitimate tribute to their memory; all his disciples are raising their heads again, and soon they will triumph. Once more Robespierreism is laying low all factions. Robespierreism is like none of them, it is neither artificial nor limited. Robespierreism exists everywhere in the Republic, among all the thoughtful and clear-sighted classes, and, naturally, among the people. The reason for this is simple: it is that Robespierreism is democracy; and these two words are absolutely identical. So, in raising up Robespierreism, you are sure to be raising up democracy."

Three days after this letter, which is of such intense historic truth, Simon Duplay, the nephew of Duplay the carpenter, who, from being the friend and secretary of Robespierre had become the friend of Babeuf, founded the *Éclaireur du peuple*, as a continuation of the *Tribun*, which had ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup> The *Éclaireur* only ran

<sup>1</sup> See the essay of M. L. Grasilier on Simon Duplay in the *Revue internationale des sociétés secrètes* of March 5, 1913.



for seven numbers. Simon Duplay went to take his place beside Babeuf on the benches of the High Court at Vendôme, with many other Robespierrists !<sup>1</sup>

We have published<sup>2</sup> the remarkable unpublished notes which Buonarroti, the historian of the *Égaux*, was still composing in his old age, in order to avenge Robespierre and lash the Thermidorians. Babeuf and Buonarroti proved their case to the democrats and Socialists of their generation.

It was not till our day, when the traditions of the Revolution are lost, and especially since 1870, with the invasion of Marxism, that French democrats and Socialists, or certain of them at least, have let themselves be misled by tendentious theses, political rather than historical, and have ceased to understand the Robespierre whom their forbears admired. But it is remarkable that the tradition has been preserved abroad, and especially in those countries for which the study of our Revolution was a means of emancipation. There they have followed the advice of Babeuf: "To revive Robespierre is to revive all the active patriots of the Republic, and with them the people !"

<sup>1</sup> M. Espinas gives their names, pp. 269-70.

<sup>2</sup> "*La politique de Robespierre et le 9 Thermidor expliqués par Buonarroti*" (Robespierre's policy and the 9th Thermidor as explained by Buonarroti) in the *Annales révolutionnaires*, t. III, 1910, pp. 481-513.



















KT-182-129

